

# Lights and Shadows

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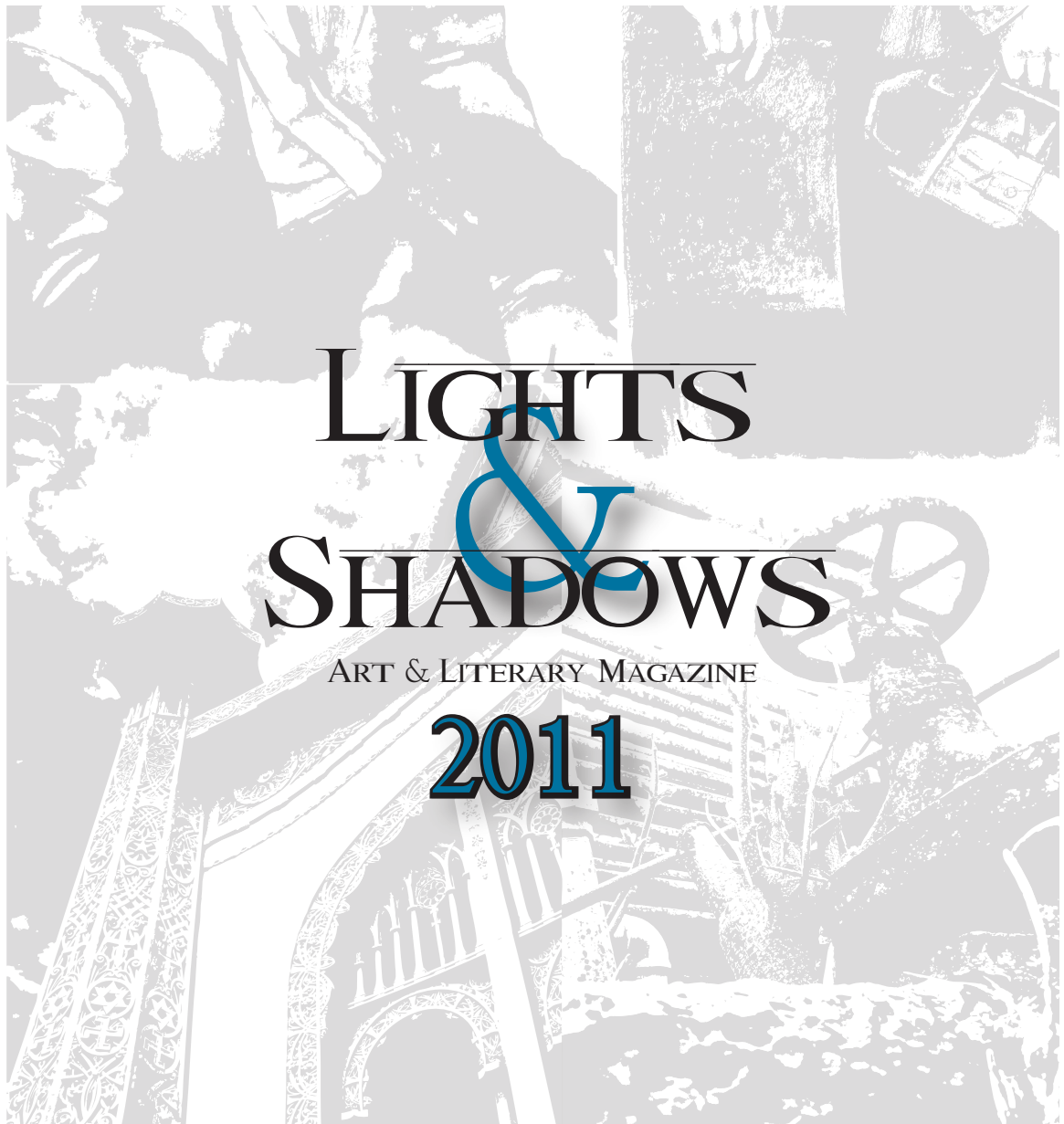
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# LIGHTS & SHADOWS

ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE

2011

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## II

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# HOUSE OF HOUSELESSNESS

Elizabeth Marmann



BEST OF SHOW

## LOVE AND MUSIC

### Chance McCullough

Until age 6, love was a warm heart with grey hair and knitted sweaters. We were not the same ages, but we would listen to music together: Elvis, Willie Nelson, and Conway Twitty. I did not like the music, but I enjoyed spending time with her.

At 10, love was a cute smile with pony tails and braces. She loved Britney Spears and so did I. She was my girlfriend for only 10 minutes but she played with my heart , and I was lost in the game.

At 19, love was a set of gorgeous brown eyes with long brown hair. We would listen to REO Speed Wagon late at night. I gave her everything but I heard it from a friend who heard it from another that she was messing around.

At 21, love became true. She was a classy blonde with a taste for Kanye West. I wanted to marry her but she could be so heart-less.

At 23, love was a curvy friend that knew everything that I liked. We would listen to Jazz and Sade in the early mornings of the night. I became a smooth operator.

After that, I gave up on lyrical music and began listening to instrumentals. Love became a dozen or so hollow beauties that didn't even know my name, much less the name of the composer that we listened to.

By the time I was 25, love became 15 minutes of repeated rhythms, a crescendo, and an awkward breakfast.

## SCIENCE CLASS

Juliann Losey

September 11, 2001

I wasn't paying attention  
My desk was beside a full glass panel door,  
Prime classroom real estate with exclusive views to the outside world  
Grass and trees didn't particularly interest me  
but they held my attention more than this class did

9 o'clock came an announcement  
Relayed to the teacher over the classroom phone  
it no doubt contained the explanation why class change was twenty minutes overdue  
120 additional seconds of the undue torture of seventh grade science  
With a sudden awareness of Mrs. Hackworth's reddening face  
And sticky tears  
my trite preteen concerns quickly faded away  
no more worries about glares or gossip ...

She turned the tv on for the instant replay  
so that over and over again  
we could watch a plane grace the New York skyline  
when a 747 slid into the cool steely side of an America icon  
and then a second plane  
and a third  
and a fourth  
and the silhouettes of people gliding off the sides

The flush of fear and anger simultaneously settled across my face  
I looked out the door to the mundane grass and trees  
And my twelve year old inner conspiracy theorist  
halfway expected a SWAT team to swarm my window  
under my assumption that every square inch of America was under attack  
It wasn't until later that I knew that emotionally, it was  
We were herded to the gym where  
Many of our group remained idiots  
Celebrating a day free from classes...



The teachers stood stunned and didn't really try to control the ignorance at all  
The rest of us... the majority... sat on the floor, oddly somber  
We felt the world changing, our sense of reality  
I said a prayer, but felt it go unheard

My father pointlessly took me from school early  
That was one of the first days I felt our drift  
I perceived his religion as lack of understanding

I could have been productive at school  
sorting out the future with my friends

## DEPRIVATION

Caitlin Leonaitis

Sullen eyes peer over a frozen, rotting sill.  
Shoeless, bony toes press into the mud floor.  
the air is bitter as a widower. Ropes of rotting  
garlic dangle from the rafters; a poor  
and paltry meal.

A young child cries from her  
nest of rags. A thin, threadbare shirt  
sticks tightly to her sweaty, feverish back, the fabric

hungry as herself. Mother boils silty water for  
absent vegetables and spluttering hope.

An exhausted father returns home with  
empty, dirt-worn hands that articulate  
the shame he cannot speak with curled and

cracking fingers. The silty water  
can't wash away the ache of loss.

## PROFESSOR CAITLIN'S GUIDE TO SURVIVING THE INTERNET

### Caitlin Leonaitis

First, blindly stumble into social networking sites with deceptively benign titles such as “Furcadia”. Follow the joining process and create your character (a lovely anthropomorphic, violet-furred cat named Selena15122). While trying to make friends, fend off bizarre sexual advances and learn that the website is hand-built to cater to mouthbreathing fetishists who find the characters from Loony Tunes arousing. Scream in terror. Consider setting the computer you lovingly built from scratch ablaze and performing an exorcism over the ashes.

Wise up and begin looking up different sites on Wikipedia before joining them. Learn that Wikipedia lies.

When you finally do join a fairly normal social networking group, give your phone number to anyone who asks. After all, they’ve been acting friendly and sane enough until now, right? Eagerly await the first phonecall from your new friend. Be greeted by the sounds of heavy, labored breathing and disturbingly earnest entreaties to join an online, polyamorous relationship with sweaty BDSM undertones. Be told you’ll be the one wearing the collar. Wonder if the money paying for that ten-dollar a month dialup fee of yours could go towards something more fulfilling and constructive such as a box of plastic raptors or a mountain of cheap cocaine.

Discover roleplaying. Learn how to play Old World of Darkness and join an online roleplaying game in the hopes that playing as a character will help you better develop your writing skills. Discover that people take the internet way too seriously and that, for the most part, “roleplay” equals “cybersex between two flagrantly and stereotypically homosexual male vampires as played by a cadre of frothing, single, 30-something year old women who refuse to venture from their own homes”. Decide that this does not help your writing at all. Burn every Anne Rice novel in the house and be glad you never actually read them.

Try to give other types of tabletop-to-internet roleplaying games a chance. Learn very quickly that it is best to immediately leave any roleplaying room in which people have their names flanked by curly brackets. Those places are not for roleplay. They are for lonely nerd pretend-sex. Join a free dating site because you entered into a wager with a friend on who could attract the most weirdos at once. Regret the fact that you were stone-cold sober when you made this deal but go on with it anyway. Receive a three-page long email full of terrible poetry about rotten hearts of gothness and dark miasmas an hour after joining from a sixty year old man from New York. Realize the attached photos lack clothing. Never go back to that site again. Give your friend the fifty bucks you agreed on, forfeit the bet, and reformat your hard drive in a vain attempt to feel clean again.

Try to learn the vernacular you often see bandied about on forum and chatrooms. Discover that most of the terms are actually for either sex acts or fetishes that you've never heard of and often defy the laws of physics. Solemnly decide that if you must look something up on urbandictionary.com to understand the meaning, it's probably better for your sanity if you pretend you never saw the word in the first place.

Agree to cam with an internet friend because you're curious as to what he looks like. Borrow your friend's computer because she has both a webcam and a cable connection. Realize he's not joking when he offers to buy you something on your Amazon wishlist if you take off your top. Make a mental note to never purchase a webcam for your own computer.

Finally realize that it's for the best if you simply remain vague as to your true gender. Use androgynous or masculine names only. Log into IRC after you have decided this with a randomly-chosen male name. Get a private message containing salacious inferences about what shall be done with your throbbing, turgid organ from some lady(?) named *Mystrezz\_vampyre*. Come to the conclusion that the internet is nothing more than a filthy den of sin and iniquity. Refuse to return.

Give the internet another chance when you start college and realize your dorm has a fairly speedy connection. Look up some of your favorite childhood shows on Youtube on a lark, and while bathing in heady nostalgia decide that maybe the internet isn't such a terrible place after all.

Upon looking for more old videos of your favorite shows, discover that there has been porn made of all the innocent characters you looked up to in your youth. Rationalize the bad porn away as just some 12-year-old boy's idea of a joke. Know your first taste of true horror when you come upon a beautifully illustrated piece of pornography involving Calvin and Hobbes genderswapped and engaged in bestiality. Realize that someone put hours, even days of effort into creating this just to provide the world with new masturbatory material. Cry in the corner and consign your soul to Azathoth the Blind Idiot God in exchange for the sweet bliss of madness.

Click on unlabeled links your friends send you because you still foolishly allow yourself to be goaded by their dares. Watch in horror as a man is anally penetrated by a horse, then find out he died of a punctured bowel soon after. Bear witness to a video in which a man eases a glass jar up his rectum, crushes it into shards, and then proceeds to calmly fish each piece out by hand as oxygen-rich blood floods the ground below. See a woman flip on her back, lift her buttocks into the air and defecate a stream of liquid sorrow in a large arc through the air and back upon her face. Become hollow and emotionless as what was left of your soul is slowly consumed by the hivemind that is internet depravity.

At this point, you are nothing more than an empty, jaded, callous husk of what may once have been a human being. Nothing shocks you any longer. Blood, necrophilia, fetishistic porn so nonsensical it's

almost comical, kittens having their heads crushed in by women wearing stiletto heels.....none of it will do so much as stir a flicker of human horror or compassion in the cold, dead hollow where your soul was once housed. Your own humor and desires are now as twisted as that which once disgusted you; you likely now embody the concept of schadenfreude and often go out of your way to upset the very internet people who created all the horrors that destroyed.

## I'M SICK

Lisa Anderson

The mother looked at her son's baseball paraphernalia. She knelt to slide an old cardboard box from under the bed. Her son had lodged it behind his baseball glove, hat, and uniform. She slid it out, barely clearing the bottom of the box spring. She fingered through colored die cast metal cars.

"Where did he get the money for all of these?"

She touched each toy a second time but didn't look at them. "It doesn't make sense". Last Christmas he had asked for a rifle, and then a knife. "I thought he'd out-grown these toys".

"Get out of my room!" her son charged. He grabbed the box. "I don't want you. I want dad to come home!"

- - - -

Nobody watched the man. Store security was busy with the other shoplifter.

"There she is," the store security representative, Jo-Beth, said to the store manager. "I saw her in court today. She's wearin' the same damn clothes. Yo-mart had her in cuffs until someone pulled out a Polaroid of the District Attorney with a goat."

Jo-Beth pounded her fist on the broken desk that had been rescued from the dumpster. A mindless shopper had lodged his shopping cart in the laminate finish, but it didn't have a lean to it.

"Careful," the store manager, Holly, said. "You never know how long you'll have to wait for another guy on a cell phone without a buggy license." The store manager yanked on the front of her polyesters and smirked as if to say something crass.

## VIRGIN DAIQUIRI

Chance McCullough

The moment before, they were kissing in the cool rainfall;  
now, a different water is falling on their playful bodies.  
The sounds of the shower head embrace their ears as  
soothing, warm droplets fall along the see-through curtain.  
The smell of freshly picked roses radiates from their  
hair to the tips of their noses.  
They take turns applying the silky lather  
as the unchaste stream of soapy water glides  
along the slippery wet bottom of the shower.

## HOW TO WORK IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

**David Sercel**

Apply for a job at Wal-Mart.

Put a check-mark by a variety of different “Preferred Positions” on the application. You really want to work in the Photo Lab, but you check other options just to increase your chances. When they call you back and you go in for an interview, you learn that cashier is the only position available at that time, so you take it. You are a very shy person, and you know that this position will demand constant interaction with the public, but it’s a job, right?

As a cashier you learn to be fast. Very fast. After a few months you can easily sling upwards of eight-hundred items an hour across your scanner. You learn where the barcodes are located on each type of product in the store so that you can do it without even looking.

Then after a while you learn that speed isn’t everything. You realize that eye contact and a smile, even if they are utterly fake, are almost always effective. It doesn’t matter if you don’t know the answer to a customer’s question or concern. If you respond while good naturedly looking them right in the eye, it usually works.

Soon you become acquainted with the colorful characters that frequent your place of work. For some, perhaps “plague your place of work” would be a better way to put it.

Within a few weeks, you meet the elderly woman that everyone refers to simply as Annie B. Along with employees from every department of every retail store in the area, you learn to cringe and look for a hiding place at her approach. She comes to your cash register to purchase a Coke and a sack of chicken from the deli. The Coke is ringing up at the wrong price, she grumbles, but refuses to tell you what she feels a more appropriate price would be. “Jus’ go ahead an’ do it,” she says exasperatedly. Then she dislikes the way you handle her chicken. “Don’t t’row it aroun’ like dat,” she complains, “an’ I wan’ it in a sep’rit sack.” Everyone has stories about their run-ins with Annie B.

There is a small homeless man who comes into the store several times a week to buy a few groceries. He is a very kindly tempered person, and though he looks old, you are pretty sure it is just the weight of a hard life showing in his face. One day he is confused about the price he is charged for a two-liter bottle of Pepsi. “Right, the taxes,” he finally realizes. “But you know, can’t complain. They use that money to help a lot of people, and animals too.”

In time you learn to appreciate the people – usually elderly couples – who only check out with you,



even if the line at your register is much longer than the others. An elderly widow and her sister come in every Friday night around nine o'clock. "Hello Mrs. Hess," you say as she begins to set her purchases on the belt. She has two separate orders; the first will be paid in cash and the second with a check. She likes her ice cream double-bagged in plastic first, and then put down inside a paper sack. You know this because you check her out every week. "Working late tonight?" she asks.

"Yes, till 11:00" you tell her.

"Not too much longer to go." She smiles and takes her receipt.

Some of your regular customers are not so welcome.

"Hello mister David!" says the small man standing at your register. His name is George. He tries to competitor-price-match everything. "Seven-ninety-nine at Foodworld," he tells you concerning the case of beer he has just set on the counter. It's ringing up at \$14.87 regular price, and you know he is just making up the Foodworld sale. You tell him that no, you can't match the price without seeing proof of the sale in an advertisement. Half of the items he sets up on the counter receive the same answer. Still, he will not leave you alone and comes to your register two or three times a week.

One day you have to explain to a young girl who is demanding a pack of cigarettes that no, a library card is not a valid form of ID, and later you shake your head in wonderment when an unshaven middle aged redneck attempts to purchase beer with his food stamp card, and then asks to see your manager when you won't give it to him.

Sometimes customers get mad at you. After all, you are the last person they deal with before they leave the store, so naturally if they have had an unsatisfactory shopping experience you are the one that hears about it. It could be worse though: you could work at the Service Desk. Up there they have to deal with dissatisfied customers all day. You have heard stories of the melees that take place up there, and at some point, the phrase "the one place I would never want to work is at the Service Desk" escapes your lips.

After working for a few months, you go through your first Christmas season in retail. It is perhaps the most harrowing experience of your life. You abandon all hope of getting the line of customers at your register down. No matter how fast and how long you work, it will always be long. By mid-December you are sick of everything relating to Christmas: decorations, cards, toys, wrapping paper, trees, and stressed out shoppers overextending their credit cards. Perhaps the worst part is the music. Beginning the day after Thanksgiving an album of Christmas classics has been playing incessantly overhead. Over and over, and then over again. By the time Christmas rolls around these perfectly serviceable holiday melodies have been twisted and perverted into a grating soundtrack to the consumer-culture madness of Christmas shopping. You never want to hear another Christmas song as long as you live.

Somehow you survive Christmas, and settle back into the normal routine of working in a retail establishment. The eight hour routine, punctuated symmetrically by a one hour lunch break, will go on for a year or two until the motions of your job become so natural that you can work, and work well, without thinking about it. Sooner or later the monotony catches up to you though. Fortunately, by the time it does your manager asks if you would like to try out at the Service Desk. “We would love to have you up here,” she says.

“My God, what am I doing,” you think to yourself as you hear your voice saying “Sure, I would love to.”

The first thing to know when you are working in Customer Service is that the old adage about the customer always being right is correct, but incomplete. In time, your job will imbue you with the cynicism necessary to complete the sentence: “The customer is always right, but sometimes they are just stupid.” By this time you already know this to a certain extent from dealing with the public at a cash register, but working at Customer Service completes your education.

During your first day behind the Customer Service Desk a short, rounded, middle aged woman slams half a watermelon down on the counter in front of you, explaining that “This watermelon has SEEDS.” You feel like rolling your eyes and saying something witty, but you don’t. You just smile and give her a refund. Eventually you experience some truly bizarre cases. A young woman brings in an empty box of condoms and demands a refund. “These didn’t work,” she tells you. Then an elderly gentleman informs you that he made a purchase yesterday and now can’t find his receipt. “Can you print another copy of my receipt for me?” You ask him what the items were that he purchased. “I don’t remember,” he says, “that’s why I want to see the receipt.”

Not all customers are unpleasant. There is a tiny, delightful, blind woman who comes in from time to time and needs help shopping. You learn that she sees more beauty in the world than most sighted people do. When she checks out she always has the person helping her get a diet 7-Up for her to drink while she waits for her ride home. One day you hear that she has died.

It is true: working at the Service Desk you receive a lot of verbal abuse, indignation, and anger from disgruntled customers. You have to learn to just shake off the insults and consternation. Sometimes you can help solve their problems and satisfy them, and sometimes their problems go much deeper than anything you have the power to remedy.

After all, you just work in Customer Service. It is not a mental health facility.

**GARAMOND****Adrianne Richards**

2ND PLACE  
DIGITAL MEDIA

## THINGS NO NIGHT HAS KNOWN

**James Thigpen**

Sometime recently, possibly a few months ago--or maybe eons--I found a note that Robert Frost had left for me from that place where Poets ascend when their souls leave their bodies.

These are the remnants of that note:

I have known things no night has known  
And seen dead men on park benches grope.  
I've felt the burn of tears while crying to the sky  
And heard the pallid pleadings for a resurrected life.

So Donne would have me know that I too must needs go.  
I've always followed him whom my mother followed also.  
Yes, his voice like the death-knell  
Falls, falls, falls

After a while Frost visited me and made some corrections. He intended this to be taken with the former:

I have known many things no night has known;  
And seen lonely men on park benches grope;  
And felt the pallid wind on my neck hairs blow;  
And heard the brazen knells  
Toll, toll, toll

So Donne would not but have me to know  
that the Raven, for me, he does also crow.  
Or was it Poe who told me no Black Cat is alone?  
It was not I, says he,  
No, no, no

## SUNDAY MORNING

Andy Thigpen

As the sun slips over the horizon  
with its sweet and slippery  
pink and purple and gold glory,  
it illuminates your living glowing  
Body next to me in this confused  
knot of sheets and legs.

You speak.

Such a sweet and sleepy sticky  
voice that melts into my ear.

Sweeter than hers was.

Sweeter than the last lick  
of last summer's ice-cream cone.

Sweeter than all the sunny days left in this life.

As we lay here in this sticky  
primordial morning, and the train's  
lonesome cry announces the sun,  
I tie the knot tighter.

## SHAME

Caitlin Leonaitis

They say that women are monsters  
toothy things with a thousand arms to  
dance the world to destruction  
Shiva, Kali  
Avatars of death and grace  
I wonder if that is what you saw  
when you looked up at me and felt  
The spear of my sharp tongue

You drink now, the alcohol sifts  
through the blood of an innocent man  
I wish you didn't see me there  
at the bottom of that bottle  
I was scared; I thought you were  
like them

Like those men who had sharp  
hands that squeezed and harsh  
words that stung and cold  
backs that turned

Instead I became to you what  
they had always been to me  
With jagged words and  
cruel eyes that couldn't  
accept you as real

and now you lie here on your kitchen  
floor, soaked in the booze and tears of  
a hundred wasted lifetimes  
and all of it for me.

**UNTITLED**

Kate Gonstad



ART FACULTY AWARD  
CHARCOAL DRAWING MERIT



## BALLPARK

### Benjamin Mott

When I was six we moved. Mom always seemed to be yelling at Dad about him taking her away from her friends and the life she had back there. I missed my friends also but I wasn't sad like her. Dad always took me to the big baseball stadium I think mostly just to get out of the house. Eventually Mom started coming with us and we all rooted for the home team in the blue jerseys.

When I was eight we moved. Mom and Dad fought over the same stuff as they always did. I remember it being a sad time because I knew I had the difficult task of making friends. About a year after moving my sister came along and that seemed to make everyone happy again. Our little family would pack up and go down to the stadium to root for the home team in the green jerseys.

When I was ten we moved. Dad had found a better job that paid better and Mom did not seem to mind moving so much this time. I found it easy to make friends here, at least easier than it was back there. Sometimes on the weekends all of my friends and family would go to the baseball games. We would laugh, and root for the home team in the orange jerseys.

When I was fourteen we moved. This was the hardest move for me. As my hormones were kicking in I can remember the pure rage I felt towards my Dad for doing this. I hated him for bringing me to this awful town. He tried to explain how this was better for the family but I wanted to hear none of it. Over time I made my friends and also made peace with my Dad. I would be going off to college soon so we made it to the stadium a few last times to root for the home team in the red jerseys.

By the time I was twenty-six my sister had moved off to college. Being alone together didn't suit my parents very well but they manage to make things work. I don't suppose they are able to catch too many baseball games since my sister and I left. As for my wife and daughter, they may not love baseball but they love the times we share down at the ballpark rooting for the home team in the blue jerseys.



## ANOTHER ROAD SIDE CROSS

John T. Young

He dies - violently. That is the known end, the undeniable absence, the firm ground you can put your feet on, and the starting point from which the neighbors, acquaintances, and town folk felt obliged to re-orchestrate the events so as to discern the omitted beginning movements which might justify the crazed finale and the decisive final note – car strikes pole. Thus almost immediately out of his abrupt silence arose a multitude of voices with no lack of imaginative resolve, a murmurous procession who out of boredom and goodness and charity of their well-wishing hearts lent their concern and advice to the comfortless corpse through their acute facility of gossip.

In an attempt to piece together the events in a manner befitting their calamitous outcome the neighbors later recalled hearing indistinct shouts and going to their windows and parting the blinds and seeing him in the manicured front lawn stride up to her, as if he would strike her and then, shuddering, as if in defiance of nature, halt - the more physically difficult act of dismemberment seemingly effortless in comparison to willed restraint. The neighbors, staring through broadly parted blinds, started for their seldom used front doors, feeling both afraid of what may happen but somehow bound to intervene. Then they watched as he turned to his truck and in manner more than reckless drove away. Slowly, the sound of his engine faded and the neighbors looked back upon the house, now utterly serene, and upon the woman standing before it dazed as if her ears were ringing as she slowly returned to herself and became likewise looked at them and for a moment everyone shamefully looked away, acted busy and then, as if she had just remembered something, like maybe dinner was on and burning she frantically rushed inside and slammed the door on her animated neighbors.

Well, according to numerous accounts, he drove in excess of 100 miles an hour down the busy two-lane highway towards town weaving in and out of traffic in either the greatest abandonment or most earnest immediacy hurtling headlong toward his unintentional ultimate destination – a telephone pole sheared into two pieces by the sheer momentum of his vehicle - the pendulous upper portion swaying gently under its own weight held upright only by the taut power lines. Everyone said driving like that down that road was as effective a mode of suicide as gun to temple and he was just lucky he didn't take anyone with him.

The only thing the residents of the adjacent trailer park knew was they thought they heard something and then their televisions and lights were out and in the darkness fumbling for matches or candles set aside for such occasions they heard sirens and walked outside into the night, the silhouetted streetlights supplied dramatic effect as the lights of the police, fire department, ambulance and utility department arrived in haste as if late for an impromptu interdepartmental meeting of the municipality.

Anyone traveling on highway 43 that evening knew they were stuck in traffic and were none too thrilled about it. After a few minutes they began to get out of their cars and approach eyeing the too straight power lines and with a curiosity peculiar to carnage, speculated with strangers who only moments ago had been cursed for tailgating, bound now by an intrigue with the unrecognizability of the

wreckage and a sudden awareness of their own frailty and lightness. "Whoever that was ain't no more." After twenty minutes or so everyone left realizing the corpse wouldn't be removed so much as wiped away.

Well the speculation began. For a few weeks every housewife, preacher, drunk and, at least ten times a day, barber committed the unforgivable sin of disturbing the dead as if it was the only sin which could not be committed in the mind much less in the telling. Some said he had let her in and she had torn herself out of him with innumerable variations on her manner of self-removal and it was only the vacuous body of a man driving that car that night and everything else had spilled out of him onto that front lawn he had left behind and it didn't really matter about the telephone pole or the traffic which only finished what had already been done. Some said the car should be investigated for evidence of some mechanical malfunction such as a sticking accelerator claiming it was out of his character and even cornered he had never acted so but they were soon reminded regardless of character that evidence had been thoroughly destroyed. Some said it would have never happened if that highway had been four-laned years ago when it was already past needing it. Some said he was just in a hurry on his way to deliver what was coming to her other lover. They speculated as one will when there is no possibility of contradiction. She never said nothing and many assumed the worst claiming some disgrace was buried with him or had buried him now voiceless. Everyone silently agreed that to just out and ask her would not have been right.

Those closest to him were unassailably demure as if the immutable decisiveness of death precluded or made vain any attempts at causal supposition or casual explanation. But those closest to him were comforted when a police officer who knew a little about wrecks said he had died painlessly his insides exploding under their own inertia immediately relieving him of any possible conduit for pain. They were comforted again days later when a cross was placed before the freshly planted telephone pole memorializing causelessness and the chorus of voices rising out of its quiet.

## HOW TO RELOCATE

Anna Jones

Be brave. Or, at least, appear to be...

You put on a face, a new one for each circumstance. You keep it in a jar by the door. You are Eleanor Rigby; no, Eleanor is your Grandma. You are just you. You are your mother's daughter. She never escaped the chains her family imprisoned her with, but you must. You are your father's daughter. You are strong, stubborn, determined. The valedictorian elbows you and you realize it's time. The rehearsed speech reaches out to your classmates, pulling them closer and closer to commencement. As you return to your seat, diploma in hand, with smiling, soon-to-be-strangers all around, a new speech is formed, rehearsed. You will say this, she will say that. Smooth transition.

Prepare for the unexpected...

The gentle click of the closing door resounds like a .44 rifle resting lazily after it has just kicked back into your already sore shoulder. You ask, "What's he doing here?" No answer. The plan has gone awry. Leaving will not be easy—not tonight, not ever. You look at your mother's face—a foreigner stares back at you, wide-eyed. You realize, she thinks you're the problem. Focus back on him, blocking the door, blocking your escape. Accusations are made in raised voices—why does no one hear? It's late. They are sleeping. And you are alone.

The room gets smaller, and you are not accustomed to shrinking rooms. You hold back angry tears, they will never see them. Your mother and her husband seem relentless. It's past midnight now and your best friend is expecting you. They say you cannot leave. Punishment for your rebellion. Your panic attack finally subsides. New plan: smile and nod.

The art of leaving...

Quick decision is the name of the game. They are both out—but for how long? An hour? Maybe two? This is the time. Pack lightly, but leave nothing behind. Leave everything behind—the fights, the shouts, the hurt—it's all been weighing you down these five long years. You lift your green and grey flowered suitcase into the deep trunk of a bright yellow car.

The places we run...

Safety: a place, a feeling, your daddy. You bring in so much baggage, but it is accepted. Custody: a tricky concept. You are fine because you are an "adult." Your brother is not so lucky, so it is time to wage a new battle. Peace is overrated. New plan: freedom for you both.

Courtrooms...

Anger outweighs intimidation when you see them. They cannot have him, they cannot have you. You prepare, searching your memories to recall the "Judge Judy" episodes you watched with Grandma

Eleanor. You imagine two sides: good and bad. Judge Judy always knows which is which and she brings justice to your small world. The actual hearing was less exciting by far, mainly talking to lawyers and dirty looks.

Getting comfortable...

Settling in to a new routine is simple for you—a professional. New job—check! Choose college—check! Clean pool—check! You once thought therapy was for “the crazies,” but soon discover it brings back confidence and calm that you have not known for a while. Being understood is impossible, but being listened to is a blessing.

Director says, “Take 427, folks!”

College. A big step. Another move.

You’ve got this.

**A NEW DAY****Rene Anderson****2ND PLACE**  
**3-DIMENSIONAL**

## MEDICINE

Caitlin Leonaitis

God, could she rip it away any faster? How did she.... There isn't enough cleavage in the world to hide a roll that big. I wasn't even allowed to see what I bought. She jammed the needle into my belted arm so fast I thought the vein collapsed, then ushered me out on her concrete steps without so much as a how's-your-mother for my troubles. I stumbled, slipped and fell as the sidewalk rose up to meet me in the rain. I didn't notice three of my front teeth had been knocked loose until a good many hours later, but I suppose that's the purpose of it, isn't it? To numb yourself. To forget.

I remember walking all the way home down that road as well, walking with the blood running down my face and freezing to my chin. That old gravel road shoved its way along the iron-grey waves of the perpetually stormy beach. It matched my mood; much like myself, the road was an unforgiving and bitter thing. It was possessed of rounded and cracked pothole mouths, ugly things that yawned upwards and outwards. They snapped at the bouncing, rickety wheels of any vehicle that dared tread its shell-lined spine. That's why I never took my car that way.

The best part? I still had a long evening ahead of me. A long evening with a throbbing head, a sore jaw and shaky hands spent in a dim black room. My back already ached at the thought of crouching over the computer screen and squeezing impossible beauty from average men and women in a thousand photographs. In better circumstances I would have preferred to relax, maybe read some Jules Verne as my toes dried out in front of the fireplace. In the state of mind I was in however, that sort of concentration was all but impossible. I shouldn't have even been working while under the influence, but I had deadlines. Besides, my heart already beat anxiously, nervous and excited both to go back to the room and see Her.

I recall now the tangled skein of how it began, the chaos of my own hideous undoing. She couldn't have known though. She was an innocent thing, a crown jewel sequestered away in a bramblepatch of poisoned berries and thorns.

I saw her face long ago when I first began my longstanding prescription. She was staring back at me from the retouchings of a dismal faux-amish photograph. She had eyes full of wonder, of glass butterflies and worlds that burst to life by her very imaginings alone. It was as though she were cocooned there, a creature of art suspended in time only to await her chrysalis. A man as simple as I felt a sense of shame in daring to touch the corners of the paper with her face, lest I despoil it with my sheer mediocrity.

It became my joy and sweet despair to gaze upon her, frail and ghostly though she was. I longed for

her even as I kept her photograph sealed safely against my breast, saw her face peering out at me from old and peeling billboards, heard a murmuring whisper I was quite certain was hers in the undercurrent of every woman's voice. Sometimes I thought I saw a mark across her face, a long terrible slash, but it would vanish as surely as it arrived.

She felt the same, I knew she did, for she began her visitations a month after our subtle courtship first took root in that stuffy and mildewed room. She crept up on me in other photographs; I saw her face tangled in the branches of a tree, strands of her spidery hair capturing dew as she shook out her coif of morning mist over a small contingent of young students smiling for an amateur's camera. In another she showed me her softer, more playful side as she swished the skirts of a forgotten debutante in an antebellum ballroom. I swear to the stars above I felt her presence hot and vibrant against my shivering chest. I began drawing pictures of her like the artists of old, intent on wooing her in a way my callous brother never would.

Him. That man, that damnable man, he came and stole my Madonna, my grace, my fire, just like he stole all the rest. Just like they flocked to his money, the harpies. He stepped into my front door with the wanton air of a man bloated to sickness by power and pride and I hated him...how I hated him.

"This place is filthy, Mark." His monotone voice droned my vices – erratic behavior, dirty clothing, eyes rimmed red with exhaustion – as I sought a method by which to remove his odious presence.

"Get out of here." I practically spat the words at him. I was unsteady on my feet and my mind ached with an unrelenting fire; I needed my medicine.

He pushed through the room in those heavy boots, the thick scent of leather, cognac, and cigars rolling off of him like a choking fog stolen from the harbor and brought to make misery for me. He wheezed out a baritone laugh.

"Strong words for a boy barely able to stand. How much did that last batch cost you? Five hundred? Six?" he looked around, his stony eyes landing on the portraits of my seductress so tastefully drawn. "Do you even remember drawing these....scribbles?" His nostrils curled upwards in distaste.

I couldn't quite control the hysteria I felt creeping up in my voice, a hysteria which I nearly shrieked as I brought his own sins to bare. I told him to take what money I had left and go back to the arms of girls half his age. I reminded him that those fat paychecks he impressed them with weren't all gained from his work alone, and asked him what it was like to victimize his own brother. He watched me dispassionately as I grew red-faced my screaming.



He was wrong of course. Certainly my home was not so clean as I was wont to keep, and my portrait lines were perilously wavy, but...did he have a point? I looked around after shouting my bile-ridden rhetoric at my brother and viewed my home with honest eyes. This was not the home of a man, but rather the roach-ridden hovel of a broken creature. It was her fault, she drove me to this, but – was that his hand resting on her portrait? No! He would not touch her.

“This is my home. Leave. Now.” I straightened my spine and nearly stumbled, my thin frame dizzied from the effort.

“You seem to forget that I own this building, brother. I finance it with those fat paychecks you saw fit to throw in my face earlier.” He frowned slightly, but his tone was calm. I could see it, could see it in his eyes. He lusted, lusted after the lady, and he would not have her!

I rushed towards the picture he eyed with those salacious dark pupils and I tore her from the frame. I felt tears burn down the sides of my nose as I destroyed her, ripped this effigy of my love to vespers and gorged the fanged drain in the sink with pieces of her memory. Robert stood there, watching me, judging me with a dispassionate gaze as I destroyed the object of his lust; he showed no more care for her destruction than he did for the ruined lives of all the young girls with which he shared a bed.

I sat around moping like a petulant child for hours afterward, missing the sunset and subsequent rise that marked the next day. I stared at the television, allowing mindless shows to gel my brain. I stared, not really comprehending what I saw...all I knew was that I had a beer riveted to my palm that replaced itself often as the hours passed. By the time I flung it at the television – I was frustrated that the reception had faltered to static – I noticed I had a pile.

“You know, maybe if you actually talked to people instead of pulling a Quasimodo up in here, you’d actually have friends. Just throwing that out there.” Oh lovely. Some jeering moron was in my television. I nee-

“Moron? Why, this handsome devil chilling out in the idiot box before you is none other than...you. Crazy, I know.” The medicine would make him go away. Where was my medicine?

I glared at my own warped reflection in the dusty glass film of the screen. Dirty blond hair, a sallow complexion, eyes sunken so deep back into the tight-lipped skull that it looked like shadows were cast permanently across the face... I couldn’t deny the likeness. “Go away. I don’t even like you.”

“Bit slow on the uptake there, aren’t you Champ? But television does that to you I suppose. You ever wondered why all the other kids at school thought you were weird? It wasn’t the face thing, boyo. Tv



people don't talk like regular people. You just never figured that out." The television doppelganger's cheeks ripped open in a bloody Glasgow grin. I knew what that meant. I flung another can at his bloodied cheeks and couldn't bring myself to look back at that horrific smile.

"You can't possibly be blaming me for this. They were morons, rubes, plebes! Idiots and sheep! They swallowed every lie Robert told and made the man a hero!"

"Probably because Robert went out and oh, I don't know talked to people instead of hiding in mom's basement like a troll. Who even says 'plebe' anyway? Who are you trying to impress? Only douchebags overcompensate like that. You have a 'little' problem?" He actually moved to check down his badly-rendered pants. "Well I know you're not trying to impress me. We've already established you're not exactly a fan."

"Can you cease your banal chattering for five minutes?" The nerve of that pompous ass, taki-

"You sure do use a lot of mean words when you talk about yourself, champ. You ever consider therapy?" The reflection tilted his head to the side, heedless of the way the stringy pale meat of his cheeks flapped like red-oozing shutters with the motion.

"Therapy is for quitters." I said in a dry tone. "Besides, it would give Robert too much satisfaction."

"There's the spirit!" The reflection stared at some point hovering just over my left shoulder. "Don't look now boss, but looks like old man sleep's coming to take his tithe early tonight. Either that or the beer's getting to you. Didn't mother ever teach you not to mix your stu- oh wait." His words echoed throughout my dreams as I felt myself slipping slowly into an insomniac's rest.

It's been two days since that argument. He had said I needed to keep my mouth shut, that he would get outside authorities involved. I threw the busted frame. I scored a hit. I only wish it'd been a different kind.

My hands are traitorous companions. I can't even hit the damn...button ....on this blasted alarm! In a fit of temper I wrap my hands around the little beast and send it sailing in an unsteady arc against the yellowed wall. It plops against the surface so gently I'd swear it was cushioned. At least the damn thing stopped screeching. I catch sight of myself in the grimy, nicotine-stained mirror above the bed; the eyes that stare back are haggard, bloodshot, desperate, framed by a grim face and a jaw sprouting a month's worth of mangy stubble. Like my hands they betray me, working in tandem with them to cause me to grasp at shadows I can see but cannot feel. But She – oh She – my salvation, my soothing balm in these sick and destitute nights, the whore of Babylon that consumes my money, she visits me now, flaming

brilliant and bright through my vision. She is like them, a woman I cannot possess, a shadow flitting just beyond the reach of my aching fingertips.

Her eyes are like the Woman's, though. How odd that I never cared to know her name. A tall creature she was, lips curled softly with a Madonna smile as she reached a pale, bony-fingered hand towards me. I was younger then, a fastidious university youth well-known for hygienic practices that bordered on the obsessive and a keenly overwrought nature. The ability to concentrate was a commodity in high demand for my fast-burning brain, and she said she could help. I loved her then for she was my savior, she gave me the medicine even as she continued to reject whatever advances weren't accompanied by a hefty bribe. I was useful to her as she was to me, a thing to be bartered for my brother's attention.... or perhaps his paycheck. All women are sisters in that regard.

When the medicine settled in my veins that first time, all my nervousness and fear climbed up into an orgasmic cacophony of pure elation. The needle slid through my skin and the belt ate into my numbing arm. I was sweating and shivering, but the nervousness was eased away by the uncomfortable warmth that stole through my veins. Nothing that I had held so fiercely and bitterly to my heart mattered. Not the constant shunning I suffered throughout my youth, the mockery I received for the huge, tumorous and discolored growth that crawls over the entire left side of my face, not the fear of facing it again as soon as I left the house and entered the judgmental stares of those outside.

I no longer cared that this woman before me stared with bilious revulsion cleverly masked behind a false and brittle smile. I didn't care that Robert used people's pity of me, his poor, freakish, deformed brother to get laid, how he'd tell lies about my tragic madness and claim he was caring for me as an invalid even as he stole my money. I didn't even care that my own mother tried to drown me as a child, or that the depression of giving birth to such a hideous thing drove her to hard drinking, fast men, and an unsuccessful lunch of '22's.

No, that didn't matter any longer. This euphoria, this joy, it felt to me akin to the nurse who stroked my hair after they had drained my lungs at the hospital. Her touch was the first kind thing I had ever known in this freezing and heartless island and that sensation rushed back to me in all its bittersweet glory. This bliss was all that mattered to me at that moment. It caressed the bad thoughts away as she once did, and as I stared upon the brittle-faced dealer before me I found their likenesses had tangled together in my mind.

It was the singular moment when I finally felt peace, and when it was gone, I was a wreck. I was a pathetic wretch of a man who couldn't find solace even in his myriad books. It grew on me though, a cancer that devoured my thoughts. The thought of her in his arms, in his bed, with his fingers treading through her loamy hair drove me to rage with a terrible quickness one evening. I had drowned what

paycheck was left to me in medicine and booze, wishing it could have instead been spent on her. She did warn me not to mix the two, but I was too depressed to listen. I knew where she lived though, and I knew that she never spent the entire night with other men...not even my suave brother. I picked the lock, a clever trick she taught me when my bribe was especially generous one evening.

I waited in her room, poured myself a snifter of brandy...then another...then another... I grew steadily more irritable as the evening wore on, jealous thoughts clashing with what shreds of practicality I had left. Had she left his home? Did he pay her? Was she still staying there, breaking her long-standing rule to be trapped in the sin of his arms? Had he stolen yet another from me? I swear I paced a trench into her floor by the time I heard that latch click.

She was furious, her eyes glazed over with a terrible frost when she saw me in her house, an intruder to her private place. But oh, oh how foolish I was, so full of anger and hubris and self-righteous hypocrisy. I spat my accusations to her, how I really felt about her professions, her life. How I knew her for what she was, harlot and criminal.

“Yeah? Funny, you didn’t seem to complain when you was handing me the cash.” She paced that selfsame trench I had carved in the floor. “Or when you used the stuff. Or when you used my stuff. What’s the matter? Big man wanna mark his turf?” Or measure sizes – the comparisons she made to my brother were maddening.

“I’m better than that. You could be too if you’d keep them shut.” What a Jezebel. And a siren, a harpy, a harlot who steals money and fills men’s bellies with deceit and lonely lies and the precious calm of the medicine. I left my mark that night though. Brandy bottles shatter, and those edges can be terribly sharp. My brother didn’t want her any more after that, which made my damn year. She was like me now, a freak like me. A monster nobody wanted. See her staring at me with those eyes, those cold, judgmental brittle eyes again!

She was the heart of all this, the Woman with her gifts and her lies and her avaricious lust for a man that was incapable of respecting her as I could, as I did. But it wasn’t her fault. She was a woman and driven by woman’s instincts. I can’t stand this, The loneliness, the desperation, my body’s cries for medicine. I must have her, but I cannot pay my backalley prescription; my brother though, ah! - he could, he could buy the medicine again and again in spades with what he stole. It is time I took from him to regain all he has taken from me.

I search out and find the frame I used to batter my brother’s back those two nights ago and tear from the wood a shard both wicked and sturdy. It feels apropos to harm him with a shatter of what he caused me to destroy, really. Wandering outside I watch as the freezing air steals my breath and turns it to ice

before my eyes; I regret I ruined my last coat now. My hands jitter and shake as I open the unlocked car door and slide inside. Key goes into the ignition, and the car shudders and dies. Wonderful. All my stressing over the medicine and I had forgotten I couldn't afford gas. Looks like I'll be walking through the drifts tonight.

Tiny splinters burrow through my ragged-gloved hands as my fingers tighten their grip around my makeshift weapon. The acrid smell of sweat and my own labored, halitosis-laden breathing is burning up my nostrils – my God, when was the last time I brushed? I can't feel my feet, flooded with melted snow and trapped in hole-ridden boots as they are. It seems almost that pure will sustains my relentless trek towards my brother's home; perhaps it is the thought that it would all soon wrap itself up neatly into a fine ball of closure that drives me. Left foot, right foot, knee's gone numb now. My thighs, my hips. I think my hand is frozen into a ball around this silly piece of wood. The other one'd better work though. These hands haven't failed me before.

His house looms over the rest of the block, overbearing and stifling much like its owner. The green-painted facade with the black trim glowers over the houses that huddle around it like frightened children. They disappoint the house, much like my brother is convinced I disappoint him. Imbecile.

I skitter up to the window, my feet nearly slipping on the iced-over flagstones that lead through his expansive courtyard. His nearby door is no less than an austere black portal that leads into the gullet of his house of sin. My fingers curl over the marble sill and I take in the sight of his living room. It was all so hideously pretentious. His floors were stone, his walls were oak paneling, and I think the furniture was cherrywood. The hand-stitched rugs didn't help either, nor did the soft lambskin leather of his ottoman. Such opulence, such decadence, and yet he would steal from me. ME. Well no more. I would have it, I would have his things, I would steal what he has and make it my own just like he did to me.

I spotted a problem. A mastiff with a black-brindled hide marches out into the room to attend his guard duty, heavy orange eyes staring out at the door. He would be difficult to circumvent once I got inside.

My hands try the door; locked, as I well suspected. I fumble around in the lining of my jacket for two simple, slender steel tools and set to work. It's so late at night I doubt there are any patrols out in this area but nevertheless I'm anxious. My back hunches over as sweat beads and freezes along my forehead while I struggle to concentrate. I'm half convinced my constant starts and stops with this thing liquefied the insides instead of unlocking them, and when the door finally slides open, it's with a sharp creak. I slink inside with all the stealth my nausea-wracked, frostbitten body can muster and allow the door to slip shut behind me.

The dog perks up, his ears tilting forward and a faint whuffling noise curling from his snout. I rush to the kitchen, nearly skidding across the hand-hewn stone and slamming my forehead against the freezer as the dog follows me with rising hair and growing growl. I rip open the fridge and search around for something to give him; in my haste I knock over a bowl, noodles plopping to the ground with a greasy, wet \*fwip\*.

The dog rushes forward and a vice clamps against my ankle with a quickness. I tear into my shoulder so hard to stifle my scream that my mouth floods with copper. The horror of hearing my own skin ripping apart, muscle twanging like a tightly-strung bow, forces vomit from my throat and onto the floor. I find a bag of ham and fling it at the beast, slices of the stuff plopping all around and mingling the scent of blood and dog drool with an odd counterpoint of honey. It didn't work. Why did I think it would? Well, the dog still had eyes.

I didn't know eyes made that sound when they were stabbed. I also didn't realize dogs could squeal quite so loudly. I shove the hysterical animal out the kitchen door and lock it behind the beast, then try to hide myself away in a broom closet. Surely that noise had to wake them!

In retrospect I'm grateful it did not. I didn't notice the trail of blood my mangled foot left, the one that led right to my poorly-chosen haven. I almost laughed when I realized why; my brother had a penchant for exhausting himself with sex and drugs. I imagine his guilt is what caused the insomnia that he tried so hard to flee. I push myself out the closet and make my way to his room.

My useless right foot slams heavily against each stair and ten thousand volts of electric pain run up my spine with each impact. I crawl my way upwards, a soft and muffled thunk of bent and twisted tissue sounding with each step. My leg leaves a trail for me to find my way home. God but I swear I can see her on the periphery of my vision, her sweet face taunting me and encouraging me in equal painful turns.

I'm panting by the time I reach the top, but through the stately hallway I can see a single door ajar: his door. My hand squeezes around the framepiece and I can feel an unexpected warmth spring through the dull tissue, making my grip slick. I drag myself in and search around, spotting the first of my quarry at the top of his bed. His lockbox – the thing in which he keeps his emergency money, my money – it was right there, right there on top of his dresser. The fool! It would take but a moment, a single moment to.....but I can't quite seem to pick the lock. My tools are not meant for such delicate work and my hands are slippery with some sort of red oil. The key. Where was the key?!

I search through the room in utter darkness in a silent frenzy befitting a murderous shadow, though I doubt I need the stealth. I can hear my own panting. I wipe more sweat from my forehead and feel a curious lassitude slip over my body as I stumble with dizzied discomfort. Occasionally I hear voices

rising from the bed, quiet and soft sighs of contentment and rest. Did my motions stir them? Ah, but it mattered little. I would have my red revenge once the means to my medicine were secured.

An hour of searching later and I have nothing but a pile of quietly-strewn mess to stand testament to my efforts. Fine, then. I'll just lift the box. I could find a jeweler I'm sure, or some streetperson willing to lend me their expertise in return for a portion of what was inside. It was of little consequence anyway. Though the money would secure more medicine, it wasn't the main objective of my arrival.

I creep up to the bed; I likely shouldn't have worried so, I know my brother's propensity towards abusing narcotics, but I can't help but use caution. What woman would he have under his covers this time, and how many? One? Two? At times he's boasted three, but he was a man given to hubris and disinclined to tell the truth when his lies can make him grander. My hand shakes as I wrap my fingers around the velvet quilt and pull it back; I don't like to admit it to myself but perhaps I am afraid of who I will find. What woman I know now has fallen under his wealth-powered charms?

I feel my breath catch in my throat and nearly collapse as the blood pools away from my brain and funnels into the pits of my stomach; the mark, it was there, right there across her face. It was -her-, a two-headed Janus with a hydra's score of faces. My hysterical mind couldn't quite process which was hers, but that mark, the MARK, she had it, it was there, she had come back to him and he accepted her. The woman I ruined, the woman I marred that only I could stand her countenance, the woman ugly like ME was here, in his bed, wrapped nude and sighing softly in his arms.

I want to disfigure them both, to finish the dire work I had come here intending to do and mutilate faces, mutilate Robert's smug grin beyond oblivion. As I lift the shard and stare again at her ruined visage resting peacefully against his chest I find that I cannot. I hesitate. I falter. Even ugly as she is, he would still have her. He would have her hideousness even as he mocked my own, and yet I would mock her. What did that say of me? Could it be that he was the b – no. No. I cannot bear to think it.

I slip the covers back over the couple and begin making my painful way downstairs, lockbox secure under my arm. Each ugly thump makes my heart crawl into my throat; would it wake them? Would the numbness wash away and pain return? I was unsure. The dog is still whining pathetically as I cross the threshold and hobble boldly out the door, into the snow, my head fuzzy and steaming with a heat not matched by the brutal outside air. Flakes are falling through the sky. Bitter winds pick up and lash against my bones. I look up at the moon there, cold and hanging frozen in a sea of glittering stars, and I wonder if it feels lost as well.

When I pull my eyes away I see out there, fluttering in the distance, a visage of my Lady. The Woman, the Woman who owns my soul and wracks my body floats there, careless and secure. Seeing her helps

renew my purpose, and I feel my worn and bent limbs curl slowly with new strength. I know where I have to go, what I must do. She smiles and I swear I can hear her voice ringing in the dull gray winds, calling me. Her arms open into an embrace I have longed for years to feel, and her puckered, marred lips mouth forgiveness. Forgiveness. Such a sweet, soft word. Such a balm to my weary soul. My eyes can't quite focus; my head throbs with every tiny motion.

I hobble out into the snowdrifts, into the icy wilderness, and there I shall find my salvation.



**RELAX**

Jordan Weisenauer



2ND PLACE  
2-DIMENSIONAL



**FREE****Malisa McClure**

If Freedom  
is a Woman  
of the Wind  
Then she is my mother.

If Freedom  
is a Man  
of Mercy  
Then he is my lover.

And if Freedom  
rests there  
over the hill  
Then surely that is my home

## BASEMENT

Alex Lindley

Deaf like stones in the empty forest  
the children sit and sniff toxins  
and death-men slither about,  
too big for the basement.  
The innocent ones  
love their mothers  
and can't help  
feigning  
joy.

## FATTIE

Caitlin Leonaitis

She moves like Frankenstein, but not the graceful one in the books; no, she's like the movie Frankenstein, the big dumb one who made all those herky-jerky steps with stiffbacked stoicism. She's in a backbrace and we all know it. I saw Eddie knock her over the other day, laugh when she rolled around in the mud and couldn't get back up on her own. The teacher blamed her when she was an hour late for class. Said she should have gone to get help.

She's fat too, but she didn't used to be. She really let herself go after getting the brace. Sure she says it's because she can't move in it, but that's just an excuse. We all know she can get out of it anytime she likes, she just chooses not to. We make fun of her whenever she eats the dessert that comes with lunch. It's a public service! Nobody wants to see that porker get fatter.

Did you hear that she hides in the bathroom to eat now? I heard that her pants fell off the other day, right in front of a bunch of people. Oliver tore her shirt open on the bus to see if the brace was even real, and she punched him in the face. He shut her up quick. The bus driver told her to stop being such an attention whore. He ignored what Oliver was doing.

When she pressed charges, the court blamed her. It was the way she dressed, with all those baggy clothes slipping off. She seduced him; I always knew Oliver had a thing for fatties. She tried her best not to cry at the trial, kept her face all serious like she thought she'd actually win. A couple days later her parents found her hanging from a rafter in the basement; I was surprised the rope could hold up a body that huge.

PROSE AWARD WINNER

## LOS ANGELES

Cherrime Kamel



2ND PLACE  
PHOTOGRAPHY

## THE FORGOTTEN

Hailey Nichols

He lingers on the side of the road  
With a sign and boots covered with mud  
From the travels he has overcome.  
We could wonder where he has been, but the  
Task of actually asking the questions becomes a  
Burden far too much to bear. How silly of us  
To try and juggle our conscience with compassion  
When there is work to be done at the office, kids to  
Be taken to soccer practice, and dinner to be cooked  
On our stainless steel stoves.

His shirt is unrecognizable to our Abercrombie status,  
But we find ourselves staring anyway. A two-legged dog  
Could run in front of our vehicle before our stares of pity  
And disturbance remove our vision from his garbage bag  
That is full of collected cans off the side of the interstate.

His sign ask for help toward the middle class millionaires  
Who always seem to find themselves without spare change.  
The cupholder full of pennies and quarters are overlooked  
As “not enough to give” so the forty dollar tank of gas  
Rolls on toward another day at work.  
We are the first ones to donate money to the book clubs,  
Band fundraisers, girl scouts, and movie theatres before  
We can give it to a fellow American caught in the struggle.

As he sits on the side of the road and watches you  
Drive away, his sign in one hand  
And hope in the other, he reminisces on the times  
When he was on his way to work or with the kids, dinner,  
And the “American Dream” on his mind.

## MOMENTO CORRYE

Juliann Losey

I heard the rumors of how you left  
It's oddly comforting to believe  
That you made your own decision  
All the things I wrote on your stuff in Sharpie  
Before bag (life is like biscotti and chai).... Your shoes (I <3 you)  
I never imagined the next would be your cool, grey coffin (You will be my inspiration)  
“Hey there Delilah” three maybe four times played over  
The sobbing gasps from Joshua... McCulley was silent  
He's been stoned ever since  
Why did you have to discover The Plain White T's first?  
It was Top 50 the summer after  
... and my instant transport from anywhere to your face in a chapel  
I hated that they put a scarf on you  
you would have wanted us to see  
Like the time you flashed Daniel and Julie at school  
to show them your newly pierced nipple rings  
Elizabeth took the marker after me  
She said she didn't know what to write  
Like so many moments that preceded & followed  
I told her to make you  
the inspiration.

## CHECKERS

**Debra Dombrowski**

Daddy drives a big car  
it's yellow like my summer dress.  
It doesn't have checks on the outside, but  
the seats are checkered black and white.

My Cowie is black and white and I  
sleep with him in my big-girl bed in my  
pink room with my little sister in my  
house with red bricks and a –

How do airplanes fly? Airplanes go over  
our house and make shadows on me and  
Ann Daugherty when we lay in the grass.

Daddy says we live by a big airport and  
airports are where planes live. My Grandma  
and Grandpa don't live across the street anymore.

They had to move away because Mommy said a  
house in the city costs less money and grandma  
likes to shop too much.

But Daddy takes us  
to visit her on Fridays after supper and we eat  
poppy seed cake and play badminton over the clothesline  
in summertime.

I hate winter. My coat itches.  
It used to be Nancy's coat. I get boxes of clothes from  
Nancy and every time I get a new box, I dig  
to the bottom to find the "hand-me-down" but I never  
find one. I'm don't know what one looks like.

Nancy and my other cousins go to a different school  
with nuns and they wear blue and green checkered  
dresses all of them the same,  
but not like the checkers  
in the new yellow car.

## COMFORT IN THE SONG

**Chase Barnett**

There is a beautiful song that sings  
All of the waves of the sea  
As sorrow drifts away from the note  
Of the songbird looking at hope in this world  
Without a decision in its dreams  
The wind is the only spirit caught in its wings  
It carries warmth in a sound  
Away from the ashes buried in the ground  
Knowing heartbeats are never very long  
There is always comfort in the song



## HOW I DECIDED TO BE ARTSY

**Juliann Losey**

The city is tall. I sometimes stare into the vertical distance on my smoke breaks, nestled by nicotine and the image of my steel nest. If it's early or late enough, the sun's rays are sliced into spotlights on my gravel rooftop stage. A moment of daydreaming and then it's back to a world of slick Americans conquering Colombian coffee before I take my paycheck home.

After wrestling through the solidarity of a day, I stroll over inconsiderate sidewalks as orange streetlights flicker to life. I imagine Fred Astair a few steps ahead of me dipping a foot of the curb, twirling around a lamppost, gracefully taping over every crack and depression all the way back to my house. There is this one bridge—it is small and dramatically open—and it would be perfect for a kissing scene. After Grace Kelley has been walking through the dense and uncertain neighborhood she falls into Fred's arms in a glorious moment framed by a Technicolor sunset.

Before I realize it I'm in my mother's Pepto Bismol colored living room staring again at the walls that clench their white porcelain plates at me while my little brother chatters about the smell of smoke on my clothes (its' crisp sticky-sweet smell stands out the musk of fried grease that soaks everything in the house). I shush him as I hang my apron by the door before my mother walks in. She straightens my apron and frowns when she sees my nametag because it is not the name she gave me, but at least she pretends not to notice the smell of smoke. I kiss her cheek with a greeting and bound up the peach carpeted stairs to my room.

My room is my sanctuary. I've papered it with posters from films across the 20th century. My bed is small, but that leaves enough room for my big screen tv and movie collections. Just as I'm about to watch *Creature from the Black Lagoon* again there's a pounding on my door. "KATHY! KATHY!" my brother shouts.

"Do NOT call her that!" my mother screams after him in her thick Persian accent. "Her name in this house is Katajun!"

I ignore them both.

"Katajun!" my brother shouts and pounds on my door.

"What?"

"Can you take me to the store?"

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I. Don’t. Want. To.”

“MOM!”

I put in my movie and lay down. Before I even get through the first re-release previews my mother opens my door. “Katajun! Take your brother to the store,” she says, looking disappointed that I didn’t jump at her surprise entrance.

“Mom,” I droned, “I just got back from work.”

She walked out of my room and said, “Even if you have no respect for your family, especially your brother, we need sugar. Just take him with you or I won’t pay for your school after all.”

Reluctantly I got up.

“Come on, pussy,” I said as I grabbed my brother by the neck and took him to a bodega a few blocks away. I bought sugar and a pack of Camel Lights while my brother got the newest comic book or something.

On the way back home, I walk slowly to enjoy my cigarette. Zeke asks me for one. “Not until you’re at least 15.”

“Kathy, what was Dad like?”

I took a drag. Zeke was only five and doesn’t even remember that the last time he wore a suit and tie was at our father’s funeral. I decide not to tell him the truth.

“Dad was great. He loved you and all of us very much,” I said. Then I did add some truth, “He was a very hard worker.” Satisfied, Zeke asked no more questions and I told him about the school I wanted to go to in California.

On Friday’s I typically wake up early. I try get to work an hour before we open so that I can leave as soon as we close. I turned off my 5:00 AM alarm clock and laid back down. I watched saw the super soft morning light touching my Venetian blinds and my Rock Hudson poster. I’ve always thought that Dad looked like Rock... and he does even more in my memory as the years go by.

My dad was a beautiful man, with a twinkle in his eye whenever he was alone. The shine fluttered away like lightning whenever Layla, Zeke or I ran up to him, but still, he was a beautiful man. I remember this one night, Mom made walnut chicken and he was in a good mood. He looked at me and said “Katajun has my eyes... my mother’s eyes. She will be very pretty when she’s old enough to date.”

I smiled with pride from the recognition, but... the actual compliment meant very little. Layla might have swooned in praise for her beauty, but I wished he noticed the things I was doing, the things I brought home for school for him. Instead, he only saw what he had contributed to me—my eyes. Even still, it was an honor to be claimed by him, so I thanked him softly and finished my dinner.

Later that night, after I had been asleep, I woke up to go to the restroom. He was downstairs in the parlor watching television like he did every night. He must have heard me walking around, because he called me.

I went downstairs and he was holding a picture I painted in school. It was a 3rd grade masterpiece in my opinion. He was looking at it and his eyes were twinkling. He thought it was a masterpiece too.

“Katajun, you may not care that you’re pretty but you need to care that you’re talented. Never let anyone let you stop caring about the gift God has given you.”

He looked at me, eyes still illuminated and smiled.

“Thank you, Abba.”

“Goodnight.”

I realized that now that I was starting not to care. The thing is, though, I did have my dad’s eyes. For all of his life that I can remember, he watched television late into the night, watching amazing films from classic to cult. On occasion, if I didn’t talk, I would watch them with him. Other times, I would watch silently from the stairs after my bedtime on school nights. My dad recognized my artistic talent, but even more than that, he inadvertently helped foster my passion.

Although I always thought he was just nonchalant towards his kids, he may have just been giving us the personal freedom that Mom didn’t readily dole out. She was always so afraid of our American assimilation, although she knew... that she was more American than she had been and that we would probably be totally American as adults. I think she just wanted to make sure we respected our Iranian heritage, especially in the stigma in post-September Eleventh America. It wasn’t long though before

Layla was wearing Baby Phat to school or even living with a guitarist in the city. When I was thirteen, I was finally allowed to have a television in my bedroom and Zeke always played football with the neighborhood boys. Whenever Mom tried to speak against this, Dad would say something in Farsi regarding the house belonging to him or something (I've never been fluent) and she would concede. Now, though, that he was gone, well things were harder.

"Mom, I need \$50."

She didn't look up from mashing strawberries on the counter. "What do you need \$50 for?"

"My college application."

"Why are you still thinking about that? You have a good job and the boy across the street likes you."

"I want to make films, Mom."

She put the now strawberry sauce into a heated sauce pan that gradually filled the kitchen with an cough medicine-like aroma.

"Katajun, I don't understand you. What kind of films are you going to make? You go to Hollywood, all you will do is film people looking sexy, making sexy faces, having sex—that is what American school will teach you—how to make, the ummm, the PORN," my mother said. She was now looking directly at me. I smelled the strawberries start to burn.

"Mom! Ughhh!—FIRST—no. Second, I am asking you for my money. I started working to help out after Dad died and Layla left. I shouldn't get the 3rd degree every time I want a little something for me."

"Fine! If you want to waste YOUR money learning to make... smut—"

Suddenly the kitchen fire alarm sounded as her strawberries started smoking.

"Maybe you would think it more apropos that I become like you—burning my strawberries and holding my daughter back from her dreams!"

She threw the saucepan into the sink and waved the smoke away from the alarm until it stopped screaming.

Her voice grew eerily quiet but blatantly angry. "So you think you are better than me?"

I looked down in an instant flush of shame and said, “No, Momma.”

“I remember when you carried your Cuddle Bear everywhere—the Green One...”

“You mean Care Bear?”

“I guess. What happened to that girl? My baby? Who cared about her family and didn’t turn up her nose when I make fruit-roll-out?”

I sighed. I couldn’t help but pause at the notion that I was being selfish. Before I could fully explore the philosophy of whether or not I was being or should be selfish my mother spoke again.

“Your father used to tell me that I was too strict.” She wiped her hands on a towel. “Bring me my checkbook and mail your application and we’ll talk about this later.”

I’ve never been good at waiting, so after I mailed my application to UCLA on Friday, I decided to go for a walk. I got dressed in whatever was closest on the floor and went out. The skies were full of luscious clouds and the oak leaves were starting to redden, but I didn’t notice. All I could think of were skies that were as clear as the oceans beneath them framed by the trunks and leaves of palm trees. I put my hands in my pocket and continued down the street, imagining walking on sand instead of asphalt. My fingers wrapped around a slick piece of cardboard. I pulled out a card that had been given to me the day before. During my shift several women walked into the shop. I noticed them in particular because they were soft spoken but confident, calm and suave—unlike our normal clientele.

One woman in the group—hair pulled back into a perfect ponytail and wearing an old rock t-shirt with a trendy scarf—looked me in the eye when she placed her order. “Grandè chai with a shot of peppermint, please.” I put in her order and took her \$20 bill. “The rest is for you,” she said. I thanked her for the tip and made the drinks as John, my manager stepped in for the other orders. I finished the first woman’s drink and as I handed it to her, I noticed an intriguing tree branch reaching around her arm. She must have seen me notice it because she turned her arm so I could see the rest of the tattoo.

“That’s beautiful,” I said.

“Thank you.”

She was looking into my eyes again. My manager snapped at me to get my attention to hand the other women their drinks. As I passed the drinks out, the first woman waited with the others. When I was done she introduced herself and her entourage.

“I’m Morgan Porter and this is Natalie, Mason and Brenda. I’m a curator at the Museum of Modern Arts Au Currant gallery and Brenda is having a showing gala tomorrow night. If you like this tattoo,” she smiled as she said, “you should come see what else she’s done,” and gestured to the woman who had identified herself as Mason.

Morgan Porter laid the card on the counter and walked out, leaving me with this intriguing piece of shiny paper that was making me think now. Really though, there was little thinking involved. I knew I wanted to go... had to go.

That night I chose a black dress—form fitting and short—appropriate for almost every occasion. As I headed to the door Mom saw me, “You going on a date?” I paused. I couldn’t tell her the truth.

“No Momma. Job interview... to be a hostess at a restaurant.”

With little contest, I was quickly out the door and jogging to the bus stop. I got off the bus a couple of blocks away from the gallery, because I wanted to walk in a few minutes late and try to blend in. My heart sped with each step. I imagined being judged by the other gallery goers—that this society had its own high-school-esque familiarity and I would be the ostracized new kid.

I pulled my cigarettes from my clutch and lit up. The cigarette was only half abused when I arrived in front of the gallery. I took the moment to my cigarettes business when Mason walked out.

“You got an extra?” she asked.

I handed her the pack and my lighter. Once she was lit too she spoke again. “Thanks. I’m a nervous wreck... JESUS.” She crouched down as though physically weighed by her stress. “I hate watching these assholes seeing my work...” she said. She took another drag and looked up at me.

“You been inside yet?” she asked.

“No about to go.”

She nodded and looked out on the empty street in front of the gallery. “They aren’t all assholes, actually. I just ... I hate showing my work. This is... my life on those walls. And strangers are staring at it.” She took a long drag.

I smoked with her. “Maybe I can be less of a stranger before I see it,” I said, not totally sure what I meant

but trying to sound compassionate.

Mason smiled and stood up. “Sure. What’s your deal? Why are you here?”

“I’m just really interested in this... I haven’t been to a gallery before. I like art though.”

“Really?” she asked rhetorically. “So...” she said as though she finally knew me, “What is your medium?” “What?” I asked totally unaware of what she meant.

“What kind of art do you make? I see artist all over your face.”

“I don’t... yet. I’m hoping to go to UCLA for film school.”

“No shit.”

“Yeah... it’s a long shot. Even if I get accepted, I don’t know if I can afford it.”

We both took a drag.

“I feel you, kid. I tell you what, put that fag out and go look at the paintings. I think you’re less of a stranger now.”

Mason opened the door for me, but didn’t follow me inside. I chose a wall to begin looking... paintings of black and white impressionist paintings of light touching common surfaces like brick walls and sewer drain covers captured my attention. I loved her use of composition—the light seemed to glisten on the canvas. As I travelled through the gallery I forgot that I was by myself among strangers in this gallery. I didn’t remember that I was anxious about potential rejection of the University I had been hoping and dreaming about. I even didn’t remember that I wanted to make films or that I had a movie collection in upwards of 200 films. I became totally and completely engrossed in what these paintings meant and represented. Every layer of paint seemed to convey emotions, seemed to speak to me, tell me about life in some way that I hadn’t thought about it before. Especially *Lilith in the Garden*... a minimalist piece of a nude woman walking away looking dejected and downcast. In my mind I built her story... the moment that was captured in front of me and wondered what her fate might be.

After I saw each piece, I approached Mason and Morgan Porter who were mingling with the viewers for the evening. I was introduced to many people, including an indie filmmaker named Dakota Nalley who was working on a documentary about the social reformation in Brooklyn. He and I began discussing the art and our favorite films and before I realized it, it was 3 in the morning.

I mildly panicked, but not enough to completely disturb me from the adoration of my new friend. He gave me his card before I got on the bus to go home.

On the bus ride home I wondered if Dakota would follow through on his desire to let me work on the film with him. I wondered if I would get accepted to film school. I wondered if I needed to go at all. I wondered, a couple of blocks from my house, how pissed my mom would be that I was coming home so late.



## FOR THE PENGUINS

Trevor Joiner



DIGITAL MEDIA  
MERIT

## SMOKING

Andy Thigpen

When I was five or so, it started with a flash and followed with a pale grey that filled up the room in the cold blue of an early morning. I watched in innocence as they breathed in and released with a light, smoky sigh. Papa would look down at me with his solemn, blue eyes and tell me, “Don’t you ever start smokin’. You’ll be sorry.” The smoke from his cigarette would float like a sinful cloud between my watery eyes and his distant gaze.

When I was ten, the smoke still rose toward the yellow ceiling, and tickled my nose with warmth like home. I noticed the look in my mother’s eyes as her father exhaled that familiar ghost into the room. She looked at me and said, “Don’t smoke son. Just because he does it, doesn’t make it right.” Papa looked sad as he stabbed gracefully into the ashtray.

At seventeen, I tried my first one. It was also my second night drinking and they told me it would settle my stomach. They offered me what was called a “Cowboy Killer,” and I watched as the smoke drifted off into the summer night. After those eight shots of vodka and that murderous bastard, I became a servant to the throne of cool, white porcelain and loudly repented of my sins.

The smoke became different when I was eighteen. The shadows became separate from their masters. The lights became more dim and intricate. My sentences became shorter. My thoughts became longer. Gradually and slowly I slept with laughter on my face. Sin. Mind. Body. All became separate and removed.

Now, at twenty-one, I chat vividly with the people around me. The small white stick is rotating between my fingers as I discuss progress and civilization. I don’t go to church, and my sins have never been farther from me as I exhale a friendly ghost into the cold December night sky.

## WAITIN' AROUND TO DIE

Cody Wix

Towne Van Zandt was whining out “Waitin around to die” from the record player the grey-haired Indian had behind the bar below the big mirror. Bobby used the pillow on his head to cover his ears. He had to escape that sound. Townes whined on singing behing the same thre chords he always repeated. Bobby started singing to himself. He let the pillow down and stared at the ceiling fan.

“I guess I’ll keep on gamblin’, lots of booze and lots of rambling. It’s easier than waiting around to die,” Bobby sang out loud.

He closed his eyes and woke up many years before laying on the kitchen floor at the house he grew up in. The white tile was stained red around his face. His skin was stuck in the dried blood as he raised his head. He moved his tongue over the gums where two of his teeth had been ten minutes earlier. The old man was sitting at the green kitchen table. He was drinking beer. Miller...always. An empty bottle of Evan Williams green label sat next to a near empty pack of Marlboro Reds. The old man was blaring Townes like he always did when he drank which was always. Townes moaned on.

One time friends I had a ma  
I even had a Pa  
He beat her with a belt once cause she cried

The old man’s hair wasn’t gray, but black as coal. Bobby knew he was almost gone. Bobby spit the tooth fragments out of his mouth and a spray of blood went as well. The old man looked at Bobby and Bobby locked eyes with him.

She told him to take care of me  
She headed down to Tennessee  
It’s easier than waitin around to die

Bobby grabbed the green label bottle and swung like a baseball bat. Bobby had good form because Jimmy’s dad had taught him how to it lie drives while the old man was still away. The bottle didn’t break. Bobby was stunned. He expected it to break. The old man’s face landed on his pack of reds.

Its two long years just waitin around to die

Bobby took a cigarette as blood began to surround the red plastic “V” on the bottom of the pack. He didn’t expect the blood to be so dark as it surrounded the pack. Searching his dad’s front pocket he found a Zippo with an American Flag on it. He lit the cigarette. He inhaled the smoke like he had done every other time he stole a cigarette from the old man. Leaning down eye level with his father’s blue eyes Bobby smiled. He blew a perfect smoke ring around the old craggy face. Bobby laughed as he walked out of the screen door.

## A FATHER'S LOVE

**Samantha Brunhoeber**

I am standing in our backyard  
contemplating the possibilities  
of a world I have yet to discover.  
My dad is running toward me  
with a mixture of fear and concern  
written on his face.  
A small child is screaming in my ears.  
I see my feet as my dad  
lifts me into the air  
carrying me to the security of our porch.  
There are tiny black scavengers  
attacking the two white pillars  
that demolished their home in the ground.  
My dad's work worn hands  
scrub my tiny feet,  
ridding them of their assailants.  
His unlimited concern and love  
for his little girl are evident through his actions.

I am standing in my backyard  
contemplating the possibilities  
of a world I have discovered.  
A young woman's voice is crying in my ears.  
My dad is on the phone  
reassuring me that I am prepared  
to face life on my own now.  
My dad's words rid me  
of my insecurities.  
His unlimited concern and love  
for his little girl are evident through his actions.

## UNPUNISHABLE CRIME

Jenn Lyles

She got away with a crime  
no care in the world.  
Of course she doesn't think it a crime  
because of how common it is.  
She could have avoided this  
but now it's too late.  
The pattern is repeating.  
I wonder how she sleeps at night  
I wonder if she cries in secret  
I wonder if there's any remorse  
behind her cold eyes and fake smile.  
I can't help but wonder  
if she thinks she's fooling the world.  
A single mom—  
waiting tables,  
who never lived up to her potential.

## A COWBOY'S CHRISTMAS

**Tess Evans**

A cowboy Christmas is like a new saddle, treated and embroidered  
With love.

A cowboy Christmas is like a new hat, specially made, and white  
As a dove.

A cowboy Christmas is a new pony, just learning how to walk.

And a cowboy Christmas is priceless, he's so overwhelmed he  
Can't even talk.

A cowboy Christmas is like a new pair of boots, each one ready to  
Ride.

A cowboy Christmas is like a new pair of jeans, bluer than the  
Bluest rushing tide.

A cowboy Christmas is a time for family and loved ones to spread  
Cheer.

And a cowboy Christmas is a new life, created through happiness  
And tears.

## TELL ME THAT YOU'RE DOING WELL

**Debra Dombrowski**

So I see you're not in hell.  
No I didn't think I'd meet you here.  
Tell me that you're doing well.

You seem fine, it's no hard sell,  
glowing from too much draft beer.  
So I see you're not yet in hell.

Ah! And here comes my death knell.  
That bitch replaced me as I'd feared.  
Tell me, does she do you well?

How to hide so you can't tell?  
Throw back shots of Everclear.  
Can't you see that I'm in hell?

I miss you and wish all was well.  
Oh, it hurts to have you near! Please,  
Tell me that you're doing well.

The past is past, I shouldn't dwell.  
Slowly now I disappear,  
retreat into my own blue hell, but  
pleased to see you're doing well.

## THE MIRROR

**Abby Tennant**

10. A playground for me and my dress up princess gown and matching pink slippers. I believed you when you said I could be whatever I wanted to be.
12. A battleground revealing all my blemishes not missing a single flaw. I believed you when you said I was pretty if my make up matched the cover of Seventeen.
15. A scale weighing me at Aeropostale, falling short of Abercrombie and Finch. I believed you when you said I was not skinny enough so I began to purge.
21. A hand-held compact I pull out for a last minute check before I dash out the door. I don't believe your lies anymore.



**UNTITLED**  
Rhiannon Clarke



**PAINTING  
MERIT**

## NERVOUS

**Benjamin Mott**

The feeling always comes  
To me at the same time  
The sweaty hands I dry on my pants but  
Five seconds later they are sweaty again  
My stomach flipping over and over  
Again almost like I can feel the crack  
In my voice before  
I even speak

## WITH IDOL AND WISHFUL SAINTS

**James Thigpen**

Contemplations over coffee  
Drizzle like raindrops from a sunny cloud  
On a wistful day sometime in March,  
April Or May.  
Coming with you is like giving this restless heart  
Something to hang on to, something to be held by,  
To cover my sins  
And dry my stains.  
It's like  
A new dawn,  
A happy couple in October,  
Two hoary ones in late winter, hugging.  
Times like these  
Will never be forgotten over healing cups of tea or  
Under open skies.  
Let's fly to the secret place named for our fading love  
Under the new moon and old stars.  
There With idols and wishful saints, we'll rejoice.

POETRY AWARD WINNER

## ALONE

Jenn Lyles

Straining her neck on all fours, Kayleigh squinted her eyes trying to find her silky pink thong that was thrown off the night before. She spotted it next to the leg of the headboard. Quietly reaching for it, she stretched her arm as far as it would go until she clenched a piece of the fabric. Quickly dressing, she stood over the man whose last name she didn't know. She wasn't sure if he'd call her, but she left her number on the nightstand, unnoticed by the young, sleeping music producer.

Pretending for a brief moment she lived there, Kayleigh waved to one of his neighbors as she backed out of the driveway, hoping they might think she was his wife, or at least a serious girlfriend. Her clock said it was 7:02 a.m. and she was racing home before her roommate realized she never came home. She knew her friend wouldn't chastise her, but also knew she'd get that cynical stare. Creeping in slowly up the stairs, she slept the day away. As night fell she prepared for yet another evening, no different than the rest.

Those old wooden floors creaked every time she stood on one leg to try on shoes. The historic, cookie-cutter townhome was just blocks from downtown Nashville. The long, pale green window panes gave the red brick structure character, and the front door was decorated with an old brass door knocker that made her first fall in love with the place. With rows of homes and nothing much to differentiate them, 302 Ford Drive was set on a cobblestone road, with a three year old Rolls Royce parked out front. To everyone who drove by, their minds wondered why someone of that stature would be living in such tight living quarters.

With her bartending attire thrown over the foot of the bedpost, her room was cluttered with jewelry, clothes, and handbags scattered everywhere. Pillow shams on the floor, her comforter had been thrown off the bed the night before, and still remained on the ground next to her bed. The room was surrounded by pictures of herself with friends, thumb-tacked on her painted chocolate brown walls, and the area rug was stained with nail polish.

Adjoining her bedroom to the bathroom was a massive walk-in closet. Wide open with no doors, the closet could've been the home's third bedroom. With shelves displaying her shoe collection, most of them ended up on the floor or stuffed in corners around the townhome. She was searching for her sling-back blue Monolo Blahniks to wear with the black halter dress she had on. The last time she had worn those shoes, she met an older doctor who showed her a good time. She couldn't even remember his face anymore. With no luck, she settled for her Chanel wedges because for one, she could find the left and the right, and two, she wanted something more comfortable to wear for a night of dancing.

Strutting into the bathroom, she shoved diet granola bar wrappers into the already full garbage can. Looking into the mirror, as if she was posing for an invisible camera, Kayleigh pulled the white gold chain necklace from around her neck out of her cleavage. The 6-carat diamond platinum ring that hung from the chain sparkled from the glare of the light into the mirror. Stopping for a second, she closed her eyes so the tears forming wouldn't ruin the black sparkly eye makeup she put on minutes earlier. After taking a deep breath, she opened her eyes and grabbed a tissue to catch the one tear that made it past her mascara. One last smile at her reflection, she walked out of the bathroom without shutting the light off.

Back in her bedroom, she sprayed a mist of perfume on her neck.

Hoping no one would think it was her engagement ring worn around her neck, she took it off and laid it on the dresser next to a framed 4x6 picture of her parents in Hawaii. Gazing at the exact ring on her mother's finger in the picture, she picked the necklace back up and put it on. The timeless ring stood out across her freckled tanned chest. With one last spray of perfume on her neck, she grabbed her keys and slammed her door behind her. She made her way down the staircase. She grabbed her Louis Vuitton purse on the coat rack, and locked her front door, heading out for the night.

This time last year she was dancing on a rooftop at a house party in L.A. at some up and coming actor's penthouse. She cranked her car, only to find it close to empty, but trusted whatever gas was in her car would make it to the club. After valet parking, Kayleigh walked to the front of the line, and without question, the bouncer stepped aside to let her in. Making her way through the crowd, she ventured straight for the VIP lounge.

"JoJo!" she hollered to her best friend, who was propped next to her boyfriend.

The site of the two in love made Kayleigh envious of what she had. She tried never to let it show.

"Where have you been?" asked Joanna, getting up from the plush, tan couch.

She was wearing a tight skirt, set right above the knee, with a white blouse with the top two buttons open. The matching suit jacket she had taken off earlier was on the couch next to her purse.

"Traffic was crazy, you know how it is."

"Did you happen to pay the cable bill?" Joanna asked with a stern face.

Every time she tried to be serious, she'd prop her head slightly to the left and couldn't help but smile. Her dad always told her she didn't have a mean bone in her body and that people walked all over her. She somewhat disagreed and for the first time, sounded demanding to her roommate.

"I'll do it tomorrow."

Joanna stared for a brief moment at her friend before getting outright pissed at her.

"But --"

"I promise," Kayleigh blurted out, looking around as not to make direct eye contact with Joanna. She tried to make it up to her, avoiding a fight.

"I'll swing by Comcast before work tomorrow. I think I go in at 2."

"OK, well rent is also due Monday..."

"Having you seen my slingback Monolo's?" Kayleigh asked, changing the subject.

"Nope. Sorry."

Wondering where they could be, Kayleigh spotted the bar.

"Let's go grab a drink. First one's on me."

The two girls walked off arm-and-arm toward the bar. Grabbing a stool, they waited for the bartender to mix their drinks.

"You and Nick looked really cozy over there. Y'all make up or something?"

"We were never in a fight, Kay. We've both just been on edge, you know, with me working so much and finishing up my Master's, we hardly ever see each other anymore. Hopefully I'll get that promotion soon,

then who knows? Maybe we'll get married or something."

Kayleigh quickly shifted the attention back to herself.

"Oh my God! I almost forgot to tell you! I went to that casting call yesterday for that Jason Aldean music video."

"Oh yeah! How did that go?"

"Uh ... great! They freakin' loved me. And one of the producers really liked me," she said with a smirk. "They said I should hear back from them by the end of the week."

"That's great, Kay. Have you told Ken?"

"Yeah, like my brother could actually care about someone other than his perfect children and boring old housewife for two seconds."

"He loves you. Don't say that. He has a lot on his shoulders and he just worries about you."

Rolling her eyes, she looked at her friend as if she was taking her older brother's side. She was used to it. Just about everyone in her life told her for years she should be more like him. But she was nothing like him. He was the responsible one. He was the one who invested his share after their parents died tragically in a plane wreck three years ago. Investing in real estate, Ken and his wife and their two children moved to the suburbs to start fresh. They enrolled their son in private school, and hired a nanny for their 2-year-old daughter. Kayleigh, on the other hand, took her share and moved out to Hollywood to pursue her career of becoming an actress. After frivolously spending the majority of her inheritance, she could no longer maintain her extravagant lifestyle. With no other option, she moved back to Nashville, and moved in to her best friend's townhome. With nothing but material possessions, the 23-year-old knew only how to live paycheck to paycheck.

"It's on me," the bartender told the girls, as he winked at Kayleigh. The two got up to go back to the lounge, as Kayleigh slipped him a twenty for a tip with her phone number written on it. She walked away slowly, knowing he'd be checking her out from the back.

After a long night of dancing, drinking, and laughing, the club closed at 2 a.m. and Kayleigh and her friends called it a night. She knew better, but went home with the bartender anyway. She liked the way they looked next to each other. She could already picture their future Christmas card. He never called her back.

Sunday afternoon, still tired from two straight late nights of dancing, Kayleigh found herself at work. She had showed up 30 minutes late, and her boss, Davis, warned her it'd be her last chance.

"Well that's quite a rock, dear," Kayleigh noted to the 30 something woman sitting at the bar, as she handed her a glass of merlot.

The woman had long, dark curls that covered most of her back. She had black, thick glasses framing her eyes, and a petite body, covered in a stylish business suit. She looked as if she had a long day at the office and needed a drink to relax her. Looking down at her hand, she realized Kayleigh was talking to her.

"Oh, yes," she softly spoke. "We're getting married next month."

The woman took a sip of her drink. Grabbing the seat next to her, Kayleigh saw it as an opportunity to



rest her tired feet.

"Well, congratulations! Who's the lucky guy?"

"His name is Mike. He runs an animal hospital a few blocks from here."

"Wow, he sounds perfect."

"Yeah, he's a good guy. So good that it lieu of gifts on our big day, he suggested our guests bring a donation for this local animal shelter we volunteer at."

"Wow," Kayleigh burst out with her eyebrows raised. She couldn't believe someone would take the attention off themselves on their own wedding day.

"People actually do that?"

"Yeah, I guess. We read about some couple who did a similar thing out West. I wasn't for it at first, but we figured we both had good jobs and everything we needed, so why not?"

Not knowing what to say next, Kayleigh felt a cloud of guilt come over her. The woman broke the awkward silence.

"Oh, are you engaged too?" she asked, noticing the ring hanging down Kayleigh's neck.

"Oh, no. This was my mom's. She died a couple years ago."

"I'm so sorry," the woman responded, looking down with regret.

"Thank you. Yeah, actually both my parents died a little over three years ago in a plane crash."

"How awful! I'm sorry I brought it up."

"No, you didn't know," Kayleigh said, looking the woman in her eyes. She put her tray down on the table.

"It's really okay. I like talking about them. I find strangers, or even my brother, are the ones who feel like we're not supposed to. Like, we can't talk about them because they're dead or something."

Kayleigh told the stranger about that fateful night just nearly three years ago, when her brother frantically called her in the middle of the night to tell her their parents had died in a plane crash. She felt those emotions come back the moment she retold the story. She hadn't spoken about it in so long.

"They say it gets easier with time, but they lie," she told them woman, choking back tears. "It actually gets harder. Every time something good happens, or even bad, I can't call them up anymore. It's strange, really. I guess I always figured they'd be there. It's hard when they're not."

The two women sat there at the lonely bar, swapping stories and laughing together.

"Well good luck with your wedding," Kayleigh said, walking back into the kitchen. "You really inspired me."

Going back to work, Kayleigh grabbed a rack of glasses from the back and brought them back up to the bar. She noticed the woman was gone. Picking up her empty wine glass, she smiled when a \$50 tip was exposed. Putting it in her pocket, she went back to work.

Monday morning came early, and after two days of late nights working the bar, Kayleigh was exhausted. She woke up to her cell phone ringing from under her pillow. At first she thought it was her alarm, knowing she had to be at work at noon. Realizing it was too early for that, she followed the ring until she found her phone.

"Hello?" she answered in a groggy voice.

"Yes ma'am, is this Kayleigh Trimble?"

Perking up she had a suspicion it was the lady from the casting call the week before.

"Yes it is, how are you?"

"Just fine thank you. This is Jeana Ransik from CMT and we want to thank you for auditioning last week. However, we've decided to go in another direction."

Kayleigh's heart sank. Crushed by her one shot to make it in the business, she covered her sorrows with her pillow and comforter. She had already told just about everyone she was sure she got the gig, and had hopes of quitting her job to pursue her new-found career. With tears in her eyes, she said goodbye, turned off her phone, and fell back asleep.

"Where have you been, I've been calling you all afternoon?" Joanna screamed, barging into Kayleigh's room hours later.

Pulling the sheets off her friend, Kayleigh yawned as she opened her eyes.

"What time is it?"

"It's 3 o'clock and Davis is pissed."

"Oh, he'll be fine. Where's my phone? Let me call him."

"No! You don't get it, do you, Kay?" Joanna said, crossing in her arms with disapproval. "He called me and said you're done. Done! He's sick of you showing up late and told me to tell you that you're officially not welcome back in his restaurant."

Getting out of bed to find some clothes, she shot back just as firm.

"Get off my back! You're just as bad as him."

"Well excuse me, but rent is due today and you don't have a job! That worries me a little."

Slamming the door behind her, Joanna got in her car and left Kayleigh alone in the house. Casually putting on a green BCBG sweat suit trimmed with rhinestones, Kayleigh grabbed her keys and headed across town to the last place she wanted to be. Years of her childhood flashbaked as Kayleigh made that dreadful drive. Thick, salty tears poured from her eyes, recalling summer days like this one where she and her mom would pick strawberries. The smell of exhaust from the truck in front of her caused her to remember years of family vacationing with her parents and brother. She couldn't understand why they had to leave her here— all alone. Irresponsible with no one to take care of her, what Kayleigh really wanted was to pull up to her parents' driveway and see her mom watering the flowers and her dad cutting the grass. She knew her mom would help her up the driveway as she spilled about her awful day, getting fired and losing the casting call. She knew her mom would take her in and cuddle her close to her heart and they would cry together. She was sure if her mom were still living, she would sit at their breakfast bar, playing with a prickly pear on the counter, as her mom would fry up bacon and whip up some chocolate chip pancakes. She never feared those days would come to an end, but when they did, it felt like a never-ending bad dream. She wondered if they missed her wherever they were as much as she yearned to see them. She worried she'd never have someone love her the way they did.

The sound of an angry driver's horn brought Kayleigh back to reality. Forgetting where she was, she



ran a stop sign and woke up from her daydream. Pulling into the long, narrow driveway, the pool boy was out back cleaning the pool, and the gardener was out front, pinching flowers. She shut her car door and walked as slowly as she could. She knew they were home—both of their cars were parked in the open garage. Making it to the front door, she sighed, wiped her wet cheeks, and rang the doorbell.

“Kayleigh?” Ken said, opening the front door.

He had seen her through the peep hole and was shocked to see his younger sister standing in his doorway after eight months of not seeing her. Running into his unopened arms, the two hugged for the first time since their parents’ funeral. Her mother always warned her that people will let you down, but you could always rely on family.

“It’s just so bad, Ken. Really, I don’t know who else to turn to,” she said to her brother and sister-in-law, sitting on their couch with a cup of coffee in her hand. “I lost my job, JoJo’s furious with me, and I have nowhere to go.”

Her nose started to burn and her lip began to quiver. She was trying to avoid a breakdown right there on that tacky, floral uncomfortable couch.

“We can’t give you any more money, Kay. You know that. We want to, but we’ve done that so many times. You have to learn on your own.”

“I know, I know. It’s not like I’m expecting you to clean up my mess. But, maybe a job? I can clean up around here, babysit, anything. Please, I’m desperate.”

Both in silence, Ken’s wife rolled her eyes as she sipped back her coffee.

“No, dear. We have plenty of help around here, and I can’t fire someone and cause them to lose their livelihood to pay for your mistakes! You’re putting your brother and me in a very difficult situation,” she said, as she put her coffee on the table in front of her. After a brief pause, she stood up.

“Excuse me, I have some calls to tend to,” she lied.

Leaving the room, she left Ken and Kayleigh in an awkward setting she no longer had to endure.

“So, that’s it? You’re not goin’ to help me out? Like, I’m officially on my own?”

“I don’t want to be like this, Kay!”

“Well you are! Gosh, what would mom and dad say right now if they could see you abandoning me like this?”

“They’d probably tell you to sell your car, maybe some clothes or other stuff and pay your bills yourself.”

Sitting there all alone on a three cushion couch, she caught a glimpse across the room of her brother and his wife on their wedding day, feeding each other the first bite of their wedding cake. She couldn’t remember where it went wrong.

She couldn’t remember why her parents had fallen in love with this woman Ken brought home after that first date they had. She couldn’t remember why she was asked to be a junior bridesmaid. She couldn’t remember why she was excited ten years ago when she accepted. She couldn’t remember why her mom had to be the one to tell her she was going to be an aunt. She also couldn’t remember why his brother’s wife called their mom, “mom,” instead of “Mrs. Trimble.”

But the more she glared at the picture, the more she could remember why that moment made everyone in the room feel so awkwardly tense. She could remember the day Ken told the family he was going to propose. He asked their mom for her ring, because a long time ago she had promised him he could give it to his future wife to keep it in their family. Of course, that was before Kayleigh was accidentally born. She could blatantly remember the look of shock on her mother's face.

"No," she told him. "Maybe one day, but not now."

With that one day just now flooding her memory, Kayleigh finally got the courage to bring it up. Something that hadn't ever been spoken of between the two of them.

"You're just jealous because I got the ring."

"What?!"

"Don't think I didn't hear that wife of yours at the funeral say I would lose it. I think she even told you she was sure it didn't mean much to me."

"I don't remember that, Kay."

"Yes you do! You always take her side. In fact, you never ever stand up for me. It's always been that way with us."

Standing up, Kayleigh then walked closer to her older brother. Kneeling down inches from his face, she was about to take the conversation too far.

"Mom never wanted to give it to you. She told me she regretted the day she promised it to you. It was always mine. Always."

She stood up, satisfied that she finally spoke her piece.

"Get out," Ken told his sister, in a deep, serious manner.

Storming off, her sadness turned into anger as she left the house no better than when she came. Climbing back into her vehicle, she then sat there for a moment, thinking about what she was about to go home to. Pulling out of Ken's driveway, playing with the necklace around her neck, a calming came over her. He wasn't right, she thought, she needed all that stuff.

Glancing into her rearview mirror, she noticed a blue something from under magazines tossed in the back seat. She couldn't quite figure out what it was. After pulling to the side of the road, she turned around to see what was hiding under them. And there they were—her blue sling-back Monolo Blahniks. In her car all along. She forgot she had even lost them.

## LOOSE GRAVEL

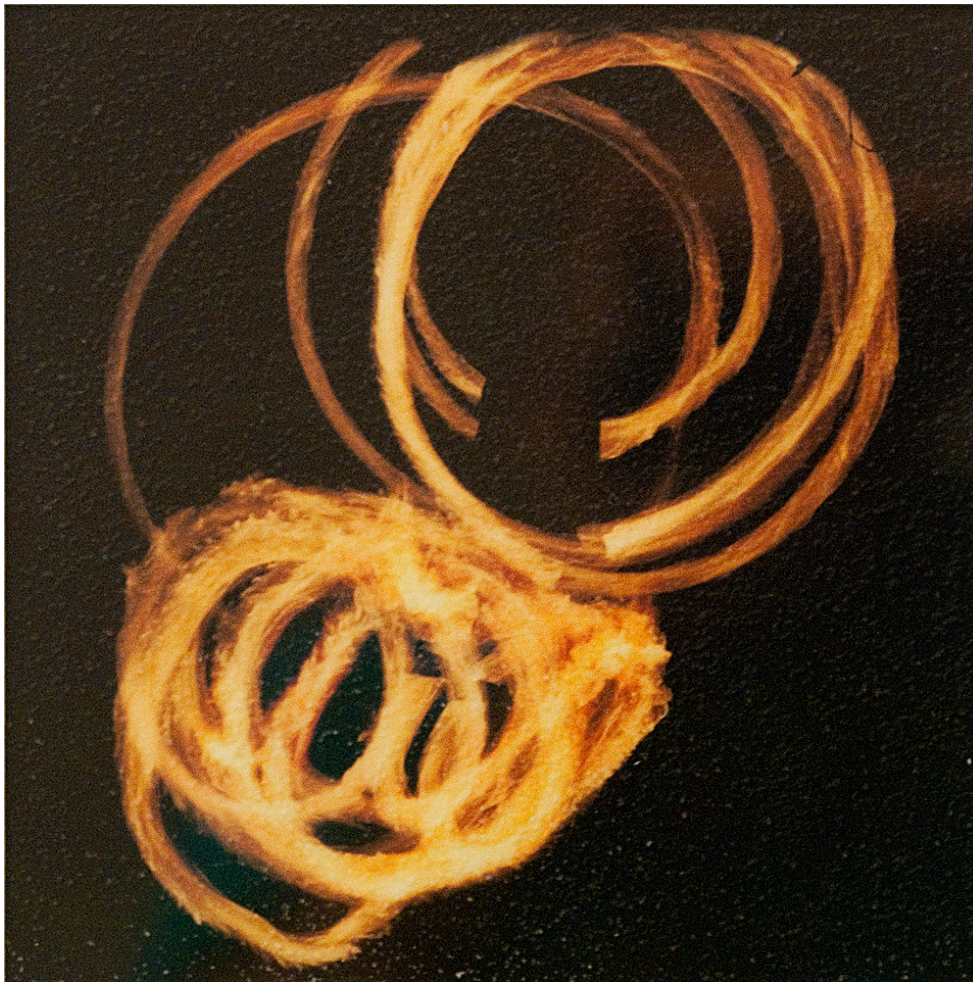
Benjamin Mott

There is a short but narrow pass that overlooks a steep gorge embedded in the side of a mountain. A man stepped on some loose gravel and plummeted to his death a few years back. He was in his mid-forties and left behind a wife and two children. He looked like the kind of guy I would've had a lot in common with judging by the story they showed on the news. When I trek past this gorge I often wonder what images flashed through his mind as the trees below quickly approached. Maybe he thought of his kids and wife. Maybe he thought of things he never accomplished. Maybe he thought of absolutely nothing at all, just a blank acceptance of what was about to happen. I also ponder what would go through my head if faced with the same fate.

November is here and with it comes the cloudy haze. The gray, wispy clouds blot out the sun making it look like an afterthought. The stark contrast of the silence of the mountain compared to that of the constant bustling drone of the city is so deafening it makes me dizzy when I really concentrate on the idea. Learning not to concentrate is something you truly do have to learn. I am not sure it is even possible when I am in my hum-drum, day-to-day life. It seems like the clouds are darker, the rain drops are bigger, and everything is filthy. Not like on the mountain. On the mountain I have white noise constantly pumping through my head and that is how I like it. That static helps me appreciate every detail of the path that I trek. Somewhere along the way, whenever returning to the city, the static turns into thumping drums and sitar plucks as "Paint it Black" pounds in my head like someone turned the radio dial. Returning to face my losses, I also return to reality.

**UNTITLED**

Carl Brackin Jr.



PHOTOGRAPHY  
MERIT

## SAN JOSE

Alex Lindley

The sweat-speckled brow of the vendor,  
A shelf of electric oranges,  
Lemons still with stems viridian--  
blushing golden cherubs,  
sour centers sweet in sense.  
The incense of flowering cornucopias,  
The rusted scale for weighing bounties,  
A narrow box for cherished coins;  
the fruits of the beaded brow.

## UNWANTED

**Amber Privett**

A steel blade enters the space  
tearing at the Life tissue  
ending the fluid air.  
A tiny hand comes off  
and the red void in its place.  
An arm comes next, a foot , a leg.  
But there is no one to care.  
A beautiful face ,still and blue,  
is separated from its base.  
Large hands holding little pieces  
smothered in red hue  
drop the remnants uncarefully  
on a steel table to displace  
and you just walk away.

## UNFORMED

Whitney Krieger

Because of a right to choose, you have no choice.  
No voice with which to cry.  
Because of those fires burning deep within  
the bellies of cold cylinders made  
to make you disappear, there will never be words  
on a mother's tender lips for you. No, you are just ash.  
Dust to dust with no name, no face, and soon forgotten.  
You and many like you are a mound of ash in the depths of  
nowhere like angels riding in thick, dark clouds overhead.  
You will never hear a lullaby. Never.  
Never feel a warm kiss for a scraped knee. Never.  
Never smell or taste a holiday dinner  
eaten with all who love you. Never.  
Because no one loves you. You are, as the  
babes of ancient Babylon, incinerated in a heap  
For a god of selfishness. No valley of Hinnom  
just the valley of Houston will do. What does  
it matter that you could have been a doctor,  
a lawyer, a teacher, a priest? You were not  
planned. You do not exist.  
The law allows your plug to be pulled.  
Your time is up  
before it begins and no one cares.  
Out of sight.  
Out of mind.  
You fade away like  
a vapor of smoke.



**BABY POP**  
Janay Winchester



DIGITAL MEDIA  
MERIT



## TWO LIVES: A DOUBLE ELEGY

Alex Lindley

### I

Late winter descends  
Like a hawk on frantic prey  
We children stricken  
Eat our Christmas cakes and watch  
The hill for Father's return

### II

Stark and fruitless night  
Snow covered and covers still  
Our shiv'ring bodies  
Nestled in ashen remains  
Of home--we come to know death

### III

We meet in comfort  
Once again in light and warmth  
Our souls coalesce  
We whirl and dance in orbit--  
The bright reverie of one

## KEYBOARD

Caitlin Leonaitis

The keyboard is still lying there, the keys choked and impacted by months of collected cigarette ashes. It seems like nothing of import, just a piece of old, abused, beat-up trash that someone forgot to throw out. For me it is a symbol of a power struggle that has been going on since before momma realized her birth control failed.

For the longest time I couldn't understand why my mother hated my father's computer so much. I didn't understand that he didn't love her, that he never loved her, that he only married her because of me and that he gave the computer more time and attention than he'd ever deign gift to her. I didn't understand why she reacted with quiet horror and fear when he started letting me play.

She was afraid it would take her baby away.

Sometimes when father gets upset, he shoots people on that computer to let off steam. Sometimes he hurts my mother. Never with fists, of course. That's not what good catholic men do. No, he hurts her with words. There's nothing in the catechism that speaks against that.

He doesn't like her cigarettes. They take money away from his 'things for me' budget. They're another thing he likes to bring up to hurt her. One time though he piled up so many hurts that she had nowhere left to bury them and they left cracks in her mind and spilled over out into her hands. She used her hands to give his hurt back, spread the hurt over the thing he loved in the form of silty, cancerous ashes. Maybe that would show him what he was doing, how painful he was, maybe it would make him see.

He just plugged in another keyboard.

## DONE WITH HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Whitney Krieger

When I was a little girl, I always looked forward to reading a book with my mother. I usually had a favorite of the week that I would insist be read to me over and over until I moved on to another one. My mother would sit patiently on the couch and wait for me to bound over on little chubby legs waving my selection in the air. I would climb into her lap and listen intently no matter how many times I had heard the words. The rich animation would leap from the page as the story played out in my mind. My mother read in a voice that rose up and down as she slipped in and out of character. She was somehow able to ignore the dirty dishes in the kitchen, the laundry that needed to be folded, and the discarded books that I left cascading from the bookcase. For those few precious moments, I did not share my mother with my brothers and my sisters or my dad. This was “us” time and we got to experience the adventure of a good book together. Before long, I could recite most of my favorites and even after I could read for myself, my mother would still read to me as she tucked me in at night. Often I would drift off to sleep to the steady hum in my mother’s voice as she read. I cannot imagine my childhood without those priceless stories of ruby slippers and poky puppies.

When I arrived at school, my favorite part of the day was story time, when the teacher would get out the biggest paperbacks I had ever seen and balance it on her knee as we sat on the carpet and stared at the brightly colored pictures. It didn’t matter how much my little friends chattered or fidgeted, it was just me and the book. I remember well the school library. It amazed me most because I had never before set foot in a place with so many books. It was like a treasure trove that made my eyes wide with wonder. There were plenty of small tables and a corner with neon-colored plastic chairs. It was a cozy place that smelled of old books, new books and the coffee of the break room in the back. There were all kinds of knickknacks on the top of the dark wooden shelves. My favorite was a mini model of the human body complete with removable organs and a swishy tongue. My class would go in once a week and sift through a pile set aside for our age until we got older. While the rest of the students would grab a book as fast as they could so that they could wander aimlessly, I would wait until there were only a few others with which to contend. Then I would serenely examine the choices though I was frequently disappointed when I had to leave before investigating all the books that the librarian would set aside for my class on a table. A few years later, I was set free to roam the aisles on my own. While other students grumbled about being forced to read as a result of the Accelerated Reader Program, I was winning awards for my participation. My only complaint was the restriction this program put on me with its reading levels and point values. It took away my ability, my total freedom to choose whether I was going to walk the yellow brick road, or look for clues within the pages of a mystery novel, or stay hidden in an attic in Nazi Germany with Anne Frank. Still, my love of literature carried me right into my college major of writing and, of course reading where I try to imitate and exceed the great foundation of my reading repertoire.

It is true that the older I get, the less time I have for reading what I enjoy. I read something everyday though. It may not be the wondrous fiction of my younger days, but I am using the life skill those days taught me. Any reading is better than no reading at all, right? I will always have in my memory the fantastic worlds to which I escaped in my books. They formed me and still influence me with their ideas and captivating language. A life of reading may have made me soft in the middle, but my mind is still sturdy. That is why I can't understand the shift in the love of reading around me. The younger generations seem to have traded in their precious literary heritage for shiny gadgets with bells and whistles. These games are merely an interactive television set which is no substitute for the rich idea-forming experience of a book. Most of the children that I meet are engaged in television watching or computer game playing or even cell phone use. Even within my own family, we cannot have a family dinner without at least a few of my nieces and nephews texting under the table or sneaking in some Nintendo product. While it does not surprise me that the "right now" generation, that has paced in front of microwaves and found a way to bypass commercials, has produced children without patience enough to sit through a book, I cannot help but grieve that this long standing form of entertainment has been rejected on so many levels. Oddly enough, writing has increased while reading has declined. It is as if all America considers itself a writer without a need to consult great literature. Still it proves an interesting point. We know that many can read. They must in order to write. So the problem lies within the motivation to do so. It seems then that illiteracy and apathy are the two biggest foes.

"Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America reports drops in all groups studied, with the steepest rate of decline - 28 percent - occurring in the youngest age groups." This study, done in 2004 by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), reveals an alarming trend of illiteracy among adults and a lack of interest in reading among most young adults and children that only continues to increase. NEA Chairman Dana Gioia had her own comments on the subject when the report was released to the public. "This report documents a national crisis," Gioia said. "Reading develops a capacity for focused attention and imaginative growth that enriches both private and public life. The decline in reading among every segment of the adult population reflects a general collapse in advanced literacy. To lose this human capacity - and all the diverse benefits it fosters - impoverishes both cultural and civic life" ([www.nea.gov/news/news04/readingatrisk.html](http://www.nea.gov/news/news04/readingatrisk.html)). On the flip side, the incessant television viewing and computer game playing has its own statistics. "Among elementary and middle-school populations, girls play[videogames] for an average of about 5.5 hours/week and boys average 13 hours/week. Playing games is not limited to adolescent boys. Recently, the Wall Street Journal reported that several companies are now designing video game consoles for preschoolers. Preschoolers aged two to five play an average of 28 minutes/day. The amount of time spent playing video games is increasing, but not at the expense of television viewing which has remained stable at about 24 hours/week." (Pediatrics for Parents, June, 2004 by Douglas A. Gentile). Is it any wonder that children have switched to video games when fewer and fewer children can read proficiently, when fewer adults that can read to them, and when more and more electronic medias designed for them offer entertainment faster?

I acknowledge that not all videogames and television programs are bad. In fact, there are many that are educational. I have to give credit to Leapster and APT for stepping up when there was a need among children for educational entertainment. After all, I had Reading Rainbow and Magic School Bus, so why shouldn't this generation have something similar? I have to admit that television and video games are natural teachers, videogames for their built in rewards system and for their hand-eye coordination requirement. Television, too, has its low-key way of putting information into a child's head. Yet should this replace the natural creativity and original thought that reading inspires? I can only imagine what would have happened to this country if Benjamin Franklin had never learned to read or if Abraham had spent all his time playing videogames. If we still associate leadership with education and education with books then why is this concept so foreign to our children? To put it bluntly, would you rather have a game or a reader leading your government or teaching the future generations?

I cannot blame the children for they are simply products of personality and upbringing, but their parents and guardians should take note. The teachers, after all, are required to try and influence a love of reading, but they cannot cultivate where there has been no seed planted. What gateway to adventure can be offered by passive television watching and can the visual world of video games really foster imagination? These are things to consider. I humbly propose that reading should coexist with these activities. Sit down with the children in your life and read. It is a gift that will serve them well beyond the eyestrain of video games and the brain numbing effects of television. The fanciful flight through a book is what childhood dreams should be made of. It is time to pull the plug and get back to the basics that formed the ideas of this country if not for our own sakes then for the sakes of Shakespeare, Franklin, Jefferson, Dickinson and Douglass whom are turning over in their graves to see where we have fallen. Once upon a time, there was a great land that did not appreciate a good book. The ending is up to you. The solution is very simple: Open up a book and open your mind!

"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents."

— Emilie Buchwald

"There are many little ways to enlarge your child's world. Love of books is the best of all."

— Jacqueline Kennedy

"Once you learn to read, you will be forever free."

— Frederick Douglass

"The man who does not read good books is no better than the man who can't."

— Mark Twain

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## TEMPLE

Caitlin Dickens



PHOTOGRAPHY  
MERIT

## **WORKIN' FOR THE**

**Alex Lindley**

Businessman awaits  
His lonely private death like  
The end of the week



## THE TWELVE

**Cody Wix**

The twelve guard my life with outstretched blades  
Twelve sticks of steel -dreaming of piercing my flesh...Bloodletting my evil  
I can smell the coolness of their skin-taste their steady methodical thoughts  
My guy fakes sincerity while the city sincerely wants me to die  
I miss him everyday-I have shed all my tears-but if I don't cry-I will die  
The mercy of the twelve has led to my death  
"Justice has been served!"  
The bloodthirsty mob of vengeance will have their victory  
This sanctified room of truth is my gas chamber  
I fly out the window where I can breathe  
I leave that doomed body behind  
I will see him  
I will not go where they want me to go  
Where they say I will go  
You twelve sanctified demons WILL NOT DECIDE THAT

## MEAN GIRL

Jenn Lyles

Her cackling laugh was annoying to me  
like the buzz of a bee in a quiet room  
Only I couldn't swat her with the bottom of my shoe.  
I could hear her giggle,  
smell her expensive perfume—  
the taste made me sick.  
I wanted to pull her bleached, unevenly dyed hair  
and hang her with it.  
I couldn't wait for the hour to end,  
when she would walk away to class.  
They call you a slut  
and they're laughing at you ... right?  
She is cheap with no class  
Why are you even popular?  
Even the chair squeaks, wanting to break  
just so it won't have to support her giant ego.  
Oh to be a bee on the wall  
so I could sting her.  
The sound of her voice is like cold, stale coffee.  
She could cause a band of perfect girls  
to develop an eating disorder.  
Au revior!  
I hear nothing but the buzz of a bee.

**NOVEMBER 8TH, 2009****Andy Thigpen**

The last time I saw you,  
you did not know me.  
The eyes in your head  
straining with all you had lost  
did not see me. Some shaggy haired  
doctor perhaps?  
My father—your son—sat back beside  
you and held your hands until.

He told me later, after I left  
you spoke  
of the birds gathered  
in a tree outside your window  
and how sweetly  
they sang.

A chorus of birds  
had come to sing you to sleep.  
How they sang for you!  
And they sang only for you.

There were no birds;  
they had already flown  
south for the winter.

**FEAR**

Clint Frenchko



2-DIMENSIONAL  
MERIT

## MACHINE

Caitlin Leonaitis

I love the warm steel  
banded under white ceramic  
flesh, obedient and  
loyal. I love the

awkward, uneven frames  
sloping down a strong  
pug nose. I love scarred  
hands, calloused and strong

built with the sharp pencil-  
tap of ten lead-filled fingernails  
I love dark eyes, brown  
like old, dead treebark and

lined with laughter like  
the waves of the Sahara  
sands. How they mirror  
shadows summoned by

Pandora's doomed inquisition.  
A mind that devours  
and spits forth monsters. I love  
how the songs never stop

clamoring like starving  
children at the baker  
I love the twitchiness  
the exhaustive need

to take this earth and slake  
the hunger for life with each  
grasping claw. This beautiful  
imperfect, asymmetrical  
rounded and powerful thing

two overlarge feet supporting  
spry legs that keep me steady  
I love the cheeks that swell  
like stung skin when I

smile. Bobbing like  
barrels in a storm. I love  
the clumsy grace this  
form holds,

wind-up, clockwork  
dance that will go  
on until my gears break and  
I shudder unto dust.

## JUDGEMENTAL SERVER

Caitlin Leonaitis

I judge you the moment you walk in.  
I know the amount you'll leave before you lay it on the table.  
If you have kids, I do my best to stop the roll of my eyes.  
When you point to an item and say "I need that,"  
in my head I say, "No, you want that."  
I know I shouldn't judge you  
but I do.  
I know I should treat everyone the same  
but I don't.  
I know I'm not better than you  
but sometimes I just think I am.  
Don't judge me  
I do it enough of it for the both of us.

## WATCH AND LISTEN

Andy Thigpen

The wooden fence posts fly by outside the car going faster than the eye could see. Each one seems to be a little more rotten and a little more crooked and a little more forlorn than the one before; the barbed wire connecting them all gradually droops and rusts away to nothing. Past the fence, on either side of the road, an impenetrable wall of trees stand swaying and twisting in the breeze while they slowly shed their colorful dresses and vibrant suits to prepare for the more comfortable, intimate setting of winter.

The road is slowly winding up. I can tell every now and then in the way my ears pop and I instinctively yawn to clear them. Despite the yawn, the drive up is exciting. It starts on flatland. Everywhere is flat compared to the mountains so no matter who you are, or where you're coming from, you're from flat land. The foothills sneak in first, imperceptibly. Nothing appears to be any different, just more forest and an occasional steep incline: something for the mountain to stand on. At some point, past the foot but not quite to the thigh, the climb increases and begins to wind through rock walls and passes. It's at this point that you can look out your window and see how high up you actually are, but the road always winds further up in front of you.

It had been a long time. How many years? Seven-teen? Twenty? Too long. This trip has been way overdue. These mountains have something for me. I can feel it. Too many people come back from the mountains with a sense of awe and wonder and a profound new outlook on life that may not last long, but it is, at the very least, a breath of fresh air for a moment before the paperwork piles up again. That's all it has been. That's all everything is: work. Day in, day out. Watching the grey, gum stained sidewalks slide under my feet, looking at my off-white office walls while filing and sorting and signing and sorting and filing, then looking at the sidewalk slide by again, up three flights of stairs, fourth door on the left, bathe, sleep, eat, repeat.

I cannot remember the last time I saw the sun. I mean really saw the sun without that vague, brown haze around it. The sun doesn't warm you in the city. It's the heat that comes from all the buildings that slowly rises up only to get trapped by that sickly, stifling cloud and forced back down again into our pores. What time is it? 5:37 p.m. Good. I'm making good time.

My cell phone starts to vibrate... zzzzzzzz... zzzzzzzz...zzzz—"Yeah, Hello?"

"Hello? Hey bud, what are you doing?" Great, Mike from the office. I wonder what he wants.

"Not too much, just driving out of town for the weekend."

"Oh yeah, you took today off didn't you?" Well obviously, I wasn't at work was I?

"Yeah I did. I needed to get out for a little while."



“Where you heading?” I can tell he feels obligated to ask.

“Up into the mountains. Wanted to go hiking.”

“Oh... Well, uh, that sounds fun, right?” Sure. “Well I was going to see if you have a minute to go over some of these notes for the presentation next week. Boss is losing his mind over it and I think it would be good if you coul—“

“I’m taking the weekend off Mike.”

“Yeah I know, but it would only take a—“

“The whole weekend, Mike. I’ll be back on Monday.”

CLICK. Power OFF.

Where was I? Oh yeah. It’s been a really long time. All these thoughts come back to me as I breathe the crisp, clear air. Thoughts without memories. I feel like my entire recent life has smeared my past together like a watercolor left out in the rain. Sure, I remember my family and little things about them. I remember living out in the woods not too far from the small city, but far enough so that I could look up and see stars at night. I remember the smell of firewood mixed with the smell the air has when it is going to snow. I remember seeing mountains a long time ago, but never getting to the top because it was “dangerous.” I remember old teachers and friends in school that I lost somewhere in that cloud, but I can’t remember much of the “gold ole’ days” that everyone is supposed to hold onto and cherish. I do, however, remember enough to know that there is something out there past my office windows, past my comfortable little street, past my city, and past the last fence post I saw several miles back. I don’t know what it could be, or what it feels like, but I know there is something because I felt it back then—A long time ago.

Time? 6:49... 50 on my wrist, and 6:55 on the dashboard clock. It’s always good to think you’re late than to actually be late. What’s next? There should be a town coming up in another hour or so. I’ll stop there for the night and get up early tomorrow to begin the hike. I plan on hiking up one of the trails, staying a couple of nights somewhere close to the summit, and then hiking down the other side. I managed to take tomorrow off so I’ll have the whole weekend to relax and enjoy myself and soak up all of it that I can.

-----

7:15. Rolling into town now. I feel like this town should be made out of Lincoln Logs. It seems like it is a little section of the world that time forgot and left behind. There are several hotels scattered off either side of the main road that are probably full during summer, but are practically abandoned now. I need a beer. It’s been a long drive and all I want is some hot food and a cold beer. Up ahead I can see the familiar

glow of neon twisted into different names and I know where I'm heading. Luckily there's a hotel out back.

I pull up beside a cobalt blue motorcycle parked out front and watch myself get out and stretch in the smooth, glittering chrome. It's gorgeous. It must be nice to ride one of those in the cool mountain air. Pure freedom.

Satisfaction is the sound of a beer bottle opening at the same time you hear a patty of ground beef hit an open grill. This place is perfect. The light is soft and the walls have that slight tinge of yellow that gives the feeling that your grandfather probably had a beer here a long time ago. My burger is ready and I let all thought fall into the rhythm of my chewing and sipping. The bartending cook disappeared to the back with a look that made it clear he wasn't worried about me, and everything was enveloped in the quiet words of "Coal Miners Daughter" drifting over from the jukebox.

A door opens to the left and heavy, booted footsteps walk up to the bar. I don't even look to see who it is until he sits down in the seat right next to mine. Why? There are nine other seats at the bar and he has to pick this one right here. Why?

"Caughtcha' lookin' at ma lady," a little bit of dip spit might have juiced out.

"Yes sir,"

Maybe he'll go away.

"She's gorgeous ain't she? She's ma own little lady. She's even better than a lady though. I do all the tunin' up ma-self and she's still less maintenance than a real one."

He had used this line before. I could tell he was used to a bit of laughter by the way he looked at me. I didn't want to over-indulge him, but I couldn't be too sure if he was feeling it. He was a thick man. He looked liked he belonged on a bike too: leather jacket, leather gloves, a thick beard that had three braids running through it with pony tail that reached to the middle of his back. His eyes were the sort of blue-grey that the sky has right before a heavy rain and it was easy to see in his eyes that he had seen places. He had a tattoo of the All-Seeing Eye on his right hand, which held an almost empty Yuengling bottle, accompanied by the four suits in a deck of cards on his left knuckles.

"She's beautiful. I've always wanted one,"

I hadn't.

"Well why dontcha?"

The last syllable sent a small breeze of alcohol to my nose.

“I don’t know, nervous I guess—“

“Nervous! You some kinda pussy or somethin’?” he asked as he punched my shoulder.

I could feel my face flush as I stopped chewing my burger.

“Even a pussy can ride a bike. I’ve known a lot of pussies in my day and you don’t look like no pussy to me. Boy I tell you what,” he paused and broke into a smile of car-wrecked teeth, “you should really see your face right now.”

He burst into a laugh that lasted a lot longer than it should have. I didn’t try to hide my anger, but I could tell he didn’t mean any harm.

“Come on man, I’m just messin’. Name’s Dick.” He shoved his calloused, sunburnt right hand over to me.

“I could’ve guessed,” as I shook his hand. Vice grip. Eye contact. No smile. Dick thought that was hilarious, “There ya go man! That was pretty funny. Gotta loosen up a little though,” another slap on the back, “You from the city ain’t cha?”

“Yeah, how could you tell?”

“Well that explains it. Get this man a beer,” he yelled to the kitchen. “The city makes people all edgy and bundled up. All good people who could live good lives get caught up and forget how to look up at someone. All the lookin’ down makes ‘em nervous.”

Dick ordered another couple beers. Another. Another. Conversation drifts from topic to topic, never staying in one place too long. I eventually come around to telling him what I’m doing up here in the country and—

“Christ, what time is it? 3:37?”

I glance at my watch and a feeling of panic holds me for a second

“Sorry, yeah... I’m out here camping. You know, trying to get away from it all.”

“Get away from what?”

“The city life, I guess. Just for a minute. Just to get a taste of life like I—“

“Nuther round, please.”

“—used to have it.”

“Well. If you want my advice, and even if you don’t you don’t gotta choice now, I’d say lose the watch. Put it somewhere and don’t look at it until you get back to the city”

“Why?”

“Cause you got nowhere to be at any time for the next three days. I never wear a watch,” he says as he pulls up his sleeves with motion of a magician assuring his audience he has no tricks. “And I have all the time in the world.”

-----

Light. Blink once. Twice. Time? My wrist says 8:17 a.m. while the alarm clock flashes a red 2:36. I roll out of bed and stagger slowly into the shower. Jesus, my head. It’s a two-hour drive to the trailhead and it’s a pretty decent hike to campsite. I need to get a move on. I pack all my stuff into the car and make a beeline for the front desk.

Cruising. Everything has a freshly washed feeling to it and the sky is overcast, but not gloomy. These roads are going by way too fast though, and I can tell they are slick. I need to take it easy. I have plenty of time. Slow down. Let’s see what’s on the radio. It’s going to be either Lil’ Wayne, Nickelback, or NPR. Well I don’t really want the urge to gouge my ears out with my tent stakes so I’ll avoid Nickelback, and I read somewhere that Lil Wayne is bad for your brain. Hey, that rhymes. I could be a rapper.

NPR is playing a piano concerto by Beethoven. You can always tell that it’s Beethoven by the feeling in the music. If you open up it can make you feel connected with all of life around you in a very incredible way. I roll the windows down and feel the cold mountain air rush in and blow my hair back as the music lets my mind wander off into the trees. Just-- beautiful. The notes from the piano drip down like rain giving a new life to the instruments around it. The flutes flutter by between the boughs of the trees sweetly and lightly accenting the lush music coming from below. The trombones hold the great ancient double-bases anchored to the earth while they, in turn, support the violins and violas falling, falling, falling, with flashes of orange and yellow and red until they finally come to rest for a moment at the place where they began. The clarinet stalks carefully through the concert hiding at times behind the bass, but always blending with the viola. Again the piano, with a drizzle turning into deluge that floods the orchestra with power and life until all the birds, trees, and the very mountain itself reverberates with the final chord that shakes the soul of creation as the conductor lowers his hands to the thunderous applause of humanity. They all begin to rise and bow in the storm of clapping hands as another car pulls up

beside me. Green Mustang. Maybe an '03? Black flat bill turned slightly to the left and pushed down over blonde tipped bangs swooped over under the bill. He has his tongue flicking in between his fingers, which are making a V-shape around his mouth, and I hear the words blasting loud and clear on his radio:

*an im gone lick her body  
I get her real wet  
kiss her on the neck  
she said come get inside me  
I told her ass no  
get back on the flo'*

With a screaming laugh and the roar of six cylinders he speeds off. Christ. If it wasn't so ridiculous I'd be more frustrated. Poor guy. He'll find it someday. The sad, interesting truth is that it might be the same IT I'm looking for.

-----

Do I have everything? Backpack, Nalgene, compass, and knife... most everything else is in the backpack. I take one last look at the watch on my wrist, 10:43, and I set it as far back under my seat as I can reach. I don't normally take advice from drunken, biker rednecks, but I think Dick might be right; I don't need time right now.

As I start walking down the trail, my feet and breath begin to fall into rhythm. The further I go in, the more all senses are excited. The smell of wet earth reaches up to my nostrils as the cold air holds my body suspended until the warmth of walking brings it back to the ground. I feel like I can see clearer than ever. No exhaust or smog in the sky to cloud my sight. Everything comes through piercing and bright with wet color as rain from the night before falls from the tops of the trees. And there's the piano trickling down again. The orchestra is faint but alive all around me as I make my way slowly up the mountain.

-----

It's dusk now. Camp is all set up. There's a big, perfect clearing here with long, soft grass. I've got some chili cooking over the fire I've built and I'm starving. I want to say it's around five o' clock, but I can't really tell. It doesn't really matter. I think I'm fairly close to the top, maybe a few hundred feet up, but that doesn't matter either. I've got nowhere to be, and all the time to get there.

As I look at my empty wrist I feel naked, but strangely light. Almost like a weight has been lifted. If I had a dollar for every time I look at that watch over the course of one workday, I could retire comfortably after one forty hour week. It reminds me of church on Sunday morning when I was a kid. We were always late. No matter how many times Dad looked at that same watch, we were always late. He would jerk the sheets off of me, open the windows, and bark like a slobbering drill sergeant until, as apathetically as possible, I rolled out of bed and got ready. "You look sharp, son," he'd say when I had dressed in an outfit not unlike his own, "Let's go get in the car." If Mom took too long getting ready he might give a quick reminder of what time it is by a few taps on the horn. Glance at the wrist. Huur—Huur. Glance at the

wrist. HUUUUUR—HUUUUUUUUUR. Mom comes rushing out the door all heels and purse with a look that's a little too sour for the Holy Sabbath, and we start off down the road at speeds that should have called for some repenting. The deacon whose job it was to hold the door open would just be going inside as we made our debut across the street, into the church, and into the back pew right as the choir had finished the opening song.

When I moved away from home to the city, and my flight was about to leave, Dad gave me the watch and said with a wink, "Don't be late."

I won't be. I haven't been. Ever. Eventually all the early arrivals, because, "if you're on time then you're late," catch up with you and you get close to snapping. Before you snap you need to breathe and remember. That's where I am now. Remembering and breathing by the glow of this campfire. The music has died down. Now it's just the faint wind blowing through the wind chime boughs of the canopy above me. I inhale my chili and drift off into sleep.

-----

Awake. It's not daylight out yet. I step out of the tent flap and the damp cold against my skin lets me know that sunrise isn't far away. I throw some more wood on the fire to get it ready for breakfast. There's a sudden crunch of leaves back down the trail a little way. It sounds big. Way too big to be anything I want to meet. I immediately start packing up as noiselessly as possible when I notice the empty chili can sitting next to the embers of the fire. Shit. That's not good. The crunching is getting closer. The fire is burning a brighter as the wood starts to catch. The tent comes down easy and I just finish cramming it into the backpack when the crunch stops on the far side of the clearing. I slide the backpack slowly on my shoulders and grip my flashlight in my left hand with my knife in my right. I can smell it. A smell like wet, hairy flesh and fresh manure drifts up by my nose, and I can tell it's close. I flip on the flashlight, and there is a big black bear with his nose searching around for a snack he has been trying to find all night. A shudder of fear wracks my core as a bead of sweat forms on my forehead. He advances a step very cautiously. I hold my ground. Why don't I run? Can I run? No. He's as scared as I am right now. I draw myself up as talk as possible and take a step toward him. He stops, looks me right in the eyes, and knows. Neither of us moves for the eternity that lies inside of a full minute. I can't explain why, but he turns away and lumbers toward the other side of the clear. I collapse on the ground shaking almost to the point of tears. The crunching is distant now and I pull myself together to start up the trail.

There's a faint light in the sky now. I want to make it to the summit to see the sunrise and put as much distance as I can between that bear and me. The trail is suddenly very steep as it winds in switchbacks up to the mountaintop. The sky is getting ever lighter and it gives the trees a ghostly blue-grey hue. A few more switchbacks and I'll be at the top. The grey is fading as the sky gets lighter and lighter. The trail clears out as I arrive at the top. There's a high promontory of rock in front of me that juts out far into the air. I throw off my pack, grab the binoculars, and begin to scale the forehead of the mountain.

Stretched before me is a living, breathing painting. The clouds from yesterday's rain are painted with brilliant hues of pink, purple, and orange from the mixing of some divine palette. All at once, the sun peeks over the horizon and ignites the entire mountainside in a single instant. Explosions of colored

ecstasy fill my eyes with the bright light of the sun, and I saw.

I did not see the pile of white papers stacked on the front right corner of my black desk in the grey office. I did not see the watch on my wrist or the clock on my dashboard, desk, or by my bed. I did not see the city streets, hot with the exhaust from crowds of speeding taxis and the curses that people yelled at them. I did not see the car, with the family inside, drifting through traffic, trying to get to church before the Lord noticed and slammed the door on them. I only saw the sun slipping over the horizon, setting fire to my vision, as the birds began to warm up their pipes and the Conductor raises his hands to ready the orchestra for another performance.

## SNAPSHOT

### Juliann Losey

In the photo, I am sitting on a brown plaid lounge with my best friend at that time, Aubrey. It's one of those foam loungers from the 80's and the only way we were able to sit on it together is because we're both younger than four years old.

Even at the time the picture was taken, she had better style than I did—hers, though, is in the full glory of the early nineties, so she's wearing a fuchsia knit shirt with lace trim under acid wash overalls. I'm pretty sure that I'm still wearing my teal pajama pants with their coordinating jersey top. It would be a few more years before we realized that the discrepancy in our households income would become apparent when Aubrey would be wearing Seven Jeans and I would wear Lee. It would be even farther down the road when Aubrey's friends were people who wore Tommy Hilfiger and my friends were people who did not.

But, in the moment of the photo, we are as close as can be. Aubrey, slightly older and larger than I am, has her arm around me and we're both smiling. Her age has afforded her enough time to grow her red, curly locks down past her shoulders, and her hair is pulled back by a fuchsia bow. My hair is blonde and wispy and has finally descended past my ears. It will be a decade or so when my hair is almost to my waist, and chemo has stripped Aubrey's hair away completely... for the second time.

Looking at us as babies it is difficult to imagine the next few years of our lives. I remember imagining when I was not much older than I was in the picture that it would be an eternity before I would get my driver's license. It's even more difficult to think that Aubrey never did.

There were a hundred more moments just like the one in the photo, because we spent a lot of time together. She would come play at my house, I would swim in her pool. We would hang out at our dads' work, and sometimes ride together after school. Then we would see each other at church, and later I would visit her in the hospital. And then finally, I saw her in the funeral home.



## VIBRATION

Tiffany Stanford



1ST PLACE  
DIGITAL MEDIA

## I TRIED

**Caitlin Leonaitis**

I wrapped you in linens, Beloved  
Wrapped you that you might be warm  
wrapped you as you once wrapped me  
in the steady strength of work-leathered arms.  
I brushed your hair; I shaved your chin  
(I remembered that you hate the stubble)  
I wrapped you in your treasures, Beloved  
Wrapped you in the symbols of our shared dreams  
Wrapped you as you once wrapped me  
in your scent, your safety  
I laid your hand just so above your sluggish, lazy heart  
(Why does it refuse to beat?)  
I wrapped myself in you, Beloved  
Wrapped myself in your heavy, banded arms  
wrapped myself in the tatters of your clothing  
and they pulled me away, Beloved  
(Cold arms make for an empty bed.)  
And now I'm watching them put your box into the hateful earth.  
I tried, Beloved.  
I tried.

## IF WE MUST LIVE

Whitney Krieger

If we must live, let it not be as things  
prized for beauty, cast before swine like pearls,  
or bought and bound by our wedding rings.  
We are the underestimated girls.  
If we must live, O let us have grit,  
so that our daughters may hold their heads high  
and push that limit as far as they deem fit!  
It is not on a man, but on themselves they must rely.  
Untie those apron strings, if you dare.  
Behold the White House, our new frontier to reach  
where an oval office waits for a woman, just and fair.  
Our daughters will be ours alone to teach.  
After this long battle is over and the victory won,  
pray, sweet ladies, that your efforts cannot be undone.

## BLOOD AND FREEDOM

**Amber Privett**

Teardrops, A thing of the norm.  
As you stand there, sit here, or lay down.  
Scattered glass. Be careful where you move.  
Lest you cut yourself some more.

Fist come at you, as plaster sprays the floor  
And a red face which smells of booze.  
“I will kill you.” he whispers.  
Staggering sporadically out the room,  
as you hold your womb.  
Staircase. One step at a time.  
Front door. Where there is light.  
Good. These bags are heavy.

A deep breath, for a new smell.  
The smell of Freedom.

## CARWRECKS

Malissa McClure

An old friend  
was cremated  
prematurely  
last night.

A little black car,  
became  
a fiery black stove.

No more corny grin,  
curly hair and skinny body.  
No more older brother,  
No more Mormon boy,  
best friend to a Mormon girl.

Skin and bones  
became  
dust and ash.

Not by the hand  
of God,  
But by an act  
of Man.

A dear old friend  
is gone.

## RUST DEVELOPMENT

Caitlin Dickens



1ST PLACE  
PHOTOGRAPHY

## FEAR AND LOATHING IN THE LONESTAR STATE

**Cody Wix**

I invoke the mantra of Dr. Thompson here not out of my own incompetence at creating a catchy title, but rather out of that racist Twain's idea that "good writers borrow, great writers steal." Yes, I am a thief.

Midnight at 80 miles an hour on a two lane road. No street lights. No cars on the road between Muscle Shoals and Alabama's own version of Sodom and Gomorra- Tuscaloosa. Here the lines wrap around the back of liquor stores and the frat boys refer to certain sorority girls as "potatoes" because of the way they are passed around. Screw this place. It smells of beer and vomit during football season and honeysuckle and broken dreams when the Tide aren't playing. Screw the University and their alter worship of a damn game, I head west. West to Texas. West to prove I am still free. My two friends sleep. The sound of Nonpoint's version of "In the air tonight" plays on repeat. They kick the crap out of the original by Phil Collins. Drummers should stay in the back where they belong.

*Well, if you told me you were drowning  
I would not lend a hand  
I've seen your face before my friend  
But I don't know if you know who I am  
Well, I was there and I saw what you did  
I saw it with my own two eyes  
So you can wipe off the grin, I know where you've been  
Its all been a pack of lies*

Four hours driving and I stop at a truck stop somewhere in Mississippi. I've always thought of Mississippi as the USA's own little third world country, but the truck stop is nice. God bless America. I fill the car up and head to the Arby's inside. Apparently open 24 hours only refers to the business, not its employees. I set my keys on the counter to wake up the overweight Hispanic guy sleeping in a chair by the drive through window. He looks at me with that disgusted glair that says "Who the hell comes to Arby's at 4 a.m.?" I do. Now walk your butt over here and get my order. Fake sausage, fake egg, fake cheese, but the croissant bread seems to be real. Back in the car. The two friends fall back asleep.

The sun breaks as I hit I-10. This interstate runs the length of the Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas. I begin my journey down this freedom road in Louisiana. Its strange how in so many ways crossing state lines would not even be noticeable if not for signs.

The two friends wake up.

One is a brother to me. Having experienced a mutual best friend deciding to eat the bullet of a .300 caliber hunting rifle because he was angry at some girl will turn friends into brothers. He is Jim. Jim is big, strong as an ox, and as crazy as an inbred pit-bull. He often fantasized in high school about getting the chance to bite someone's nose off in a fight. He said if you bit someone's nose off in a fight no one would ever mess with you again.

The other is tall and muscular, the body of a swimmer and of a boy who is vain enough to ensure his muscles are always prominent. He is a follower. His intelligence is relegated to what he has learned in school. Life has yet to be his teacher. His name is Sam.

My ultimate destination is Texas and more specifically North Padre Island National Seashore. This is not to be confused with South Padre Island where college kids from all over the south go to drink, have sex, vomit, and then repeat. No, North Padre Island is a national park that has a beach nearing 80 miles in length. I was drawn by the prospect of camping on the beach right near the ocean. This is not possible in Alabama.

The drive is 16 hours. I have been at it for 6. I'm almost to New Orleans. I say a thank you when I realize I-10 bypasses the Big Easy. The image of Anderson Cooper saying, after Katrina, that New Orleans was as bad as any African war zone he'd ever seen was enough to convince me to not even slow down. I had learned from Cooper's book that he had seen the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. This trip was about freedom not tempting the gods. The American Dream was on I-10 heading west. Katrina had forced New Orleans to temporarily secede from that dream and I wanted no part of it.

Twenty four hours into my spring break, no sleep, no alcohol. I just wanted out of Alabama as fast as possible. I need freedom. I need I-10. I need Texas. At a gas station somewhere in Louisiana selling \$3.00 shrimp po' boys, I hand over the wheel and move to the back seat to catch some rest. After crossing the tenth bayou I fall asleep.

I awake dreary, thoughts of easier times floating away with the foggiess. I see a bull. Not a real one. A statue in front a restaurant or a hat store or something. My first thought is that the bull statue at the Mexican restaurant in Corinth, Mississippi is much larger and much more masculine. I'm in Texas, the disappointment has begun.

I go back to sleep. The Bull in my dreams. Mississippi bulls are bigger than Texas bulls? What the hell man? What is America coming to? I awake on the outskirts of Houston. The crazy one, Jim, is driving. Ninety miles an hour. Concrete barricades six inches from my face on the left. Twelve inches on the right.

"Whoa dude! don't get so close to the concrete," I yell.



“Chill man I’m fine. It just looks closer than it is,” Jim says as he takes another long drink of his energy drink.

“Don’t tell me to chill it’s my car and you’re like five inches from the freakin’ concrete!” I snap.

Jim ignores my scolding and cranks up the volume on his Ipod. The chorus of a rap song I’ve never heard starts to play.

*I’ve been traveling on this road too long. Just tryin’ to find my way back home. The old me is dead and gone, dead and gone, dead and one*

Jim seems to know every word. He enunciates each syllable as if he knows personally what the rapper is trying to tell the world. He turns back to check for cars as he changes lanes. I realize his shirt advertises the name of a famous metal band in large letters.

“Wow! Look at that,” says Sam, “That building is massive.”

Sam fires a digital camera. That young calf hasn’t ever seen a concrete jungle. Not like this. Not Texas style. Birmingham maybe, with it’s small impotent skyline, but not this jungle of metal and oil refineries. No wonder “W” had dreams of this place while he was in the white house. The sheer hubris of Houston will make even the most humble among us turn arrogant.

80, 85, 90 we hit 90 on the Houston free-way. But, I’ve missed the smell everyone has told me about. That Houston smell that has a special way of combining the stench of oil, tacos, and greed. God, how I’ve yearned for that smell. But plenty of Texas flags in its place. Ole’ glory is almost nonexistent. In fact I haven’t seen one American flag yet. The sole source of pride of this place is thrown in my face everywhere... Texas.

Am I in another country? Have I crossed the line into some foreign land that has pressure cooked the American dream into a concentrated goo?

That thought mixes with the rap song as I dose off.

*Ever had one of them days wish would’ve stayed home  
Run into a group who gettin’ they hate on  
You walk by  
They get wrong*

I wake up as the car slams to a stop.

“Yo dude, you want some food?,” Jim asks.

“Yea man,” I reply.

“You think since we’re in Texas it’ll taste better Jim?” Sam asks.

“Probably not, but it’s cheap,” Jim says.

I get out of the car and the sun blinds me. I reach for my sunglasses and realize where we’ve stopped. I have to laugh to myself. We’re literally 300 miles from the Mexican border and we’ve stopped at what is most American’s first experience with another culture...Taco Bell.

After eating, I grab the wheel and we get back on the road. We leave the outskirts of Houston and the comforts of I-10. I exit towards Corpus Christi and onto Texas State Highway number 59. Two hours later we reach Corpus.

Corpus Christi in spring resembles a football stadium in summer. The facilities and structure are stuck in a perpetual holding pattern until their time arrives. March is not Corpus Christi’s time. The highway that takes you into Corpus Christi is lined on either side with oil refineries. A total of seven major companies have their refineries based in Corpus Christi. The result is entering a beach town with the image of, well a beach town in your head. The reality is a pile of dust and metal. It’s apocalyptic. The road seems to go on forever. The road entering a similar beach town ,Gulf Shores, Alabama, is full of souvenir shops and seafood restaurants. I suspect had that city discovered oil instead of tourism it would be more similar to Corpus.

“What are those things?” asks Sam.

“Well the giant white tanks are what they store the oil in and the pipes and metal are just part of the refinery,” I reply.

“I ain’t never seen so much metal man, you sure we’re goin’ to the beach?” asks Sam.

“Yea man, just gotta get through all this crap first,” I reply.

We exit onto a road that takes us towards Padre Island. I count seven Whata Burger fast food restaurants just on this stretch of road. I later learned there are 11 just in the city limits of Corpus Christi. We also pass a sign that says Naval Air Station Corpus Christi.

I pass two souvenir shops with empty parking lots. The closer we get to the park the more scarce buildings become until there are none. Just small rolling hills with waist high grass that stretch out of sight on either side of the road. We approach the park entrance and pay the fee of \$8 and get a slip of paper to prove it. We drive another twenty minutes until the blacktop abruptly turns to sand. I lean my head out of the window to read a sign: BEACHES IN TEXAS ARE PUBLIC HIGHWAYS. I drive my two

wheel drive, front wheel drive, Suzuki onto the sand. I am determined to find a stretch of secluded beach. This proves to be near impossible because of RV after RV and small truck campers every twenty feet. I drive 6 miles from where the road ended before I find a satisfactory spot.

“This will do” I tell my buddies.

“Hell yea!” Jim yells.

“Finally,” Sam yawns.

“Let’s get the tent and canopy set up,” I yell over the wind.

Jim and I grab the tent and attempt to set it up. Having spent two years being paid to take college students backpacking, this should be easy for me. The wind nearly rips the blue tent out of our hands as soon as we unpack it.

“Damn, this wind is blowin’!” Jim screams in my direction.

“Let’s get next to the car see if that’ll help,” I yell back.

We get the majority of the tent put together then try to walk it the ten feet to our campsite. The wind blows into the tent and the tent opens like a sail. Neither Jim nor I can hold on and the tent goes flying. We chase it down but give up on the tent for the moment. Sam already has the canopy unpacked, so we start on it. We get it up and weight it down with plastic trash bags full of sand.

The sun is already starting to lower over the ocean when I start to cook dinner. I have a backpacking stove and I cook a pot of jambalya for the three of us. Really it’s just Rotel, rice, beans and some Cajun seasoning, but it fills us up. The sand is already starting to get in everything.

“This is good stuff except for the sand in it,” Sam complains.

“Whatever quit gripin’ you little girl,” Jim says.

Tired and stressed from the drive we decide to abandon the idea of sleeping in a tent. We all grab our sleeping bags and form a little circle around a lantern we set up on top of our cooler. Sam is the first one to crack a bottle. He makes cocktails of Jeagermeister and Red Bull. It tastes like Kool Aid and between the three of us the bottle empties in a hurry. I let Sam and Jim drink most of it and I tackle a flask of whiskey on my own.

The alcohol’s effect on the conversation is rather immediate. We start talking about women, the most disturbing and strange topic three young men can attempt to tackle. The topic turns to my recent breakup.

Jim takes the hard-line.

"They're all crazy. Man I ain't never getn' married," Jim says to no one. "They don't do any good for you, just screw with your head all the time. Relationships are pointless."

Sam disagrees.

"Not when you got one that makes you happy, Jim," Sam argues. "When you find her you'll be singing a different tune."

I don't really care what either of them is saying. I didn't come here to think about anything. This trip is about getting away from everything. All my problems. The goal has always been to first drive the problems away. Then drink the problems away to the ocean's lullaby. The 15 hours and the whiskey catch up and slip into sleep.

The next morning we drive into town to get some supplies. We go to Wal-Mart to get portable speakers for the ipod. Then we drive to the gas station to get beer and ice. Then Sam decides he wants more Jeager, so we go to the liquor store. Before we drive back out to the campsite we go to one of the Whata Burgers we passed on our way into Corpus Christi. I decide to stay in the car and make some phone calls while the other two spend their money on greasy fast food.

"Man you shoulda come eat that was the best burger I've ever had," Sam exaggerates.

"He's right it was pretty good," Jim agrees.

We pile back in the car and drive to the campsite. The sun is about midway in the sky now. We stop at the little convenience store in the park to get water. The radio is over the p.a. system.

"There is a wind advisory for this evening. Gusts will reach 50 mph in coastal areas. Please be advised," says the voice on the radio.

We get our drinks and go back out to the campsite. When we arrive our canopy we set up is giving in to the pressure of the wind. We fix it the best we can and try to weight it down more. The two friends start drinking beer while I make myself a lunch of summer sausage, cheese, and tortillas. I crack a cold beer open as well.

"Man you drinkin' those Natty lights like a champ," Jim screams over the wind.

"They taste horrible but their cold," I reply.

After a few beers a white Jeep Cherokee pulls up about twenty feet from our campsite. A guy and two girls get out. Jim, already drunk at this point, walks over to greet the new neighbors.

"Hey ya'll! What's up, my name's Jim, we're from Alabama, where ya'll from?"

Sam runs to catch up to Jim. I sit with my back up against the cooler. I curse the wind for blowing sand in my beer and for blowing neighbors to my camp site. I brought these two along cause I trusted them and enjoyed their company, but I have no intentions of making friends with anyone this weekend. Neither do I plan on socializing with other humans at all. I drink another beer to douse the anger.

The new neighbors were from Missouri and all had generic names. Generic names for generic people from a generic state. Please go away. But, my companions seem to want to socialize so I join and carve out a seat in the sand.

James begins telling stories of fights he's been in and Sam comments here and there.

"Hell yea he head-butted that guy unconscious," Sam lied.

Sam had never been around a fight much less in one and he sure hadn't been around Jim while he was engaging in his favorite past time. But, he continues to talk Jim up and Jim never stops him. I sit and drank beer and stare at the ocean. The wind picks up even more.

It starts getting dark and everyone passes around bottles of liquor. I drink something. I don't know and I don't care what it is. The stories continue. Jim tells about getting electrocuted with a taser for twenty dollars. Sam tells about his mixed martial arts classes. At some point I learn the guy from Missouri is not dating either of the girls he came with. That makes him lucky, crazy, or gay. Probably all three. I don't really care. I go sit by myself on a dune for a while.

The sand feels like bugs crawling on my face. I wipe it off. It comes back. I open my eyes and see nothing but blackness. No moon, no stars, just blackness. The wind had blown a little sand drift up against my head. I rise up and shake it out of my hair and it just flies right back into my face. The wind is howling now. That's probably what woke me up. I can't even hear the ocean and it's only a few feet down the dune. I get up and take my sleeping bag with me. I'm so thirsty. I'm probably dehydrated from the alcohol. I need to get to the water in the car. I walk down towards the car and past the canopy. The canopy resembles a mass of scrap metal and nylon. I cuss myself for leaving it up in these winds.

"Jim! Sam!" I yell.

No one answers, but it's probably because the wind is so loud. I keep walking towards the car. But, there is no car. It's gone. I figure they've probably driven it over to where the Missouri people are, but it's not there. That car is gone as well.

"Where the hell are you guys?" I yell again.

My mouth is turning to cotton from the dehydration. My heart starts to race. Adrenaline clears away the rest of the fog from alcohol and sleep. My eyesight sharpens, night-vision becomes crisp, and my hearing more acute. None of that helps, because the friends are no-where to be found. I forget about my brand-new sleeping bag and I turn around as it flies over a dune. I don't even care about that. The dehydration is getting worse now that my heart rate is up and I need water.

I continue to yell into the wind.

I look around for tracks and can see where the car did a circle. But, I can't tell which way they went. I know I need fresh water and soon. I begin walking down the beach. I try to walk fast but not fast enough to get my heart rate up anymore. I know I'm six miles from the road. I do some quick math and realize that's close to a three or four hour walk. And the park store is another three miles from the road. Six miles with no fresh water.

An hour into the hike, or maybe two I have no way of knowing, fear and desperation are replaced with rage. My car has been taken without my permission. I have been left in the middle of a national park with no fresh water. I've been abandoned by those I put my trust in.

Sometime later I pass an RV. I ponder knocking on the door. But, I remember it's the middle of the night and I am in Texas. That means the owners most likely own a gun. I'll take my chances and tuck that away as a last resort. The notion that I have been released from a survival situation is enough to completely clear any remaining emotions of fear. Nothing but anger now. I want blood. They're dead.

All of a sudden I see two beams of light ahead of me bouncing off the dunes to my left. I start walking faster. I see headlights come over the horizon. The car comes closer and closer. It stops in front of me.

"Cody! Man have we got a story for you!" Sam yells.

"Yea man it was crazy!" Jim agrees.

I snap.

"You bastards stole my car and left me with no water in the middle of no-where!" I scream.

The mood turns ugly. Jim is still drunk. He changes from jovial to raging mad at my apparent ungratefulness at the rescue. He quickly threatens to injure me. At this point the driver steps out. It's then that I realize what kind of car it is. And the fact there is a driver.

"I am in a Toyota Prius on the beach at hightide! Get in this car now because if I get stuck you're paying for it!" the driver screams.

I don't argue. I jump in the back with the other two. Sam is in the middle. Jim continues to threaten my health.

"I swear to god Cody, nobody talks down to me like that!" Jim screams from a foot away. "As soon as I get out of this car I'm gunna kick your butt!"

And he was right. He would kick my butt. I knew there was no way I could handle Jim in a physical confrontation and I didn't want to. But, I wasn't going to back down. Suddenly we hit asphalt and the driver slams on the breaks. The mood changes.

"Before we go anywhere else, you two gentlemen are going to apologize to your friend here for what you've done to him!" the driver says.

They both look at each other and then away from me. They apologize then begin the story.

"Look man it's actually kind of funny Cody," Sam begins. "We decided to go Whataburger to get some food and we were bringing you some back right Jim?"

Jim still wants to shove my head through the window. He remains silent.

"Anyway we went to Whataburger and accidently got turned around and ended up on a Navy base," Sam says. "Remember that Navy base we passed on the way in."

Jim speaks.

"Look man we just wanted to get you something to eat," Jim says.

"Where is my car?" I ask.

"Well see..." Sam starts.

This time I'm furious I begin to yell.

"Where in the hell is my car!" I scream.

The driver steps in.

"Son what's your name?" the driver asks.

"Cody Wix," I reply.

"Well Mr. Wix your friends here ran through the gate at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi at 4 o'clock in the morning," he begins. "They were immediately pulled over and pulled out of the car. Both were

intoxicated and both were minors. They told the officers about you out here on the island and so they called my cab company.”

It just occurred to me I was in a taxi-cab.

“I had to sign for their custody in order for them to leave the base to come get you,” he continues. “Your car is impounded on the base and that is where we are headed now.”

I sit silent.

“It was kind of funny, Jim was like messin’ with guards and stuff,” says Sam.

“It wasn’t funny, shut up Sam,” Jim orders.

“If your friends would have run the gate at another base they would have been shot on the spot,” the driver says.” I know I use to be a naval security officer here in Corpus.”

But they’ve had to deal with drunk college kids before, so they’re not as trigger happy; however, both of your friends are charged with felonies.”

We pull into the base and then drive to where my car is impounded. The officer that arrested them makes me take a field sobriety test. I pass, but barely. I’m dizzy from lack of sleep and water. The officer let’s us go. We drive back towards the island. No one talks.

I stop at a gas station and fill up. I explain calmly to both of them that as soon as we get to the campsite to pack everything up because we are leaving Texas. At the camp site the canopy is unrecognizable and my sleeping bag is no-where to be found. We pile up what we can in the car. We throw the scrap metal in a giant dumpster where the asphalt begins again.

I point the car towards home and start driving. I turn Nonpoint back on repeat.

*Well, if you told me you were drowning*

*I would not lend a hand*

*But I don’t know if you know who I am*

*Well, I was there and I saw what you did*

*I saw it with my own two eyes*

*So you can wipe off the grin, I know where you’ve been*

*Its all been a pack of lies*

The car ride screams with the tension of silence. Fifteen hours of driving and the only sound in the car is the radio and the tires on the road. No longer is the car filled with talk of girls and plans for the future. The conversations that are typical for three twenty-year-old guys to have are non-existent. I internalize my anger and fight the urge to vocalize the betrayal I’ve experienced.

A few hours in I begin to question myself.



*“Should I forgive them and just laugh at the whole thing?”*

*“Jim has been my friend since middle school could I just try to talk to him?”*

*“Is this just a stupid mistake by two drunk idiots or is it evidence of their true lack of loyalty?”*

I argue and argue with myself the entire way home. As I pull into my driveway I decide that continuing a friendship with people who will leave you stranded in the middle of nowhere, steal your car, drive drunk in your stolen car, and get the car impounded on a Navy base is a futile endeavour.

“Get your crap out of my car and get away from me and my house.”

I decide to extend that silence past the fifteen hour drive.

**17****Jenn Lyles**

“I’m pregnant. What should I do?”  
She was confiding in us for a reason  
and perhaps it was my words she was relying on.  
Maybe her decision would have been different  
had I told her she could do it.

## LADY BALDWIN

Andy Thigpen

The old piano in my room  
might've been anywhere.  
I bought it for seventy-five bucks  
and I don't regret it.

It might've been anywhere!  
Chicago, St. Louis, New York, Muscle Shoals.  
Why would I regret  
a green piano that has played the blues?

New York, Savannah, Memphis, San Fran.  
How many fingers have touched this beauty?  
She wears a faded green dress and her voice is old and blue  
but she has held up through the years.

How many fingers have played this beauty?  
Who has danced with her 'till dawn down Lennox Ave?  
She's held up through the years  
and her voice sings honky tonk and blues.

How much music has she made?  
Countless hands have scaled her octaves  
to make her sing. She has a sultry sound  
and now she's all mine.

I don't know how many lovers have scaled her octaves,  
crying on the keys of that old piano in my room,  
but now her voice sings with mine  
and she was only seventy-five bucks.

**CHARGER**

Adrianne Richards



1ST PLACE  
3-DIMENSIONAL